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[“YES;” MAY SAID, GENTLY. “I KNOW; WE ALL WANT LOVE IN OUR LIVES.”]

MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG RECLUSE OF ST. ORMO.

It was spring-tide, and all nature was astir with fresh young life.

The sky overhead was clear and blue; the grass underfoot of emerald green, while the forest trees, with their verdant young shoots and tender leaves, were picturesquely grouped about a large steel-grey lake, and clothed the hillside of the rising ground beyond, and upon its banks grew rare specimens of ferns, and feathery undergrowth, making a whole to be greatly admired, and not easily forgotten.

The solitary dwelling-house in view was a many-gabled cottage, with golden thatch and rose-hung walls, standing with its garden down to the water's brink—a beautiful, well-cultivated garden, with many-hued flowers, like bright jewels in the pretty-shaped beds out in the mossy lawn; and fine specimens of

deodaras, monkey trees, and lausonias planted tastefully about. A winding path of trim gravel, a border of dainty beds, flanked by a tangle of flowering shrubs, completed the picture.

No; it was not complete, until the fairy of the scene came upon the spot, to give it life and animation.

A rich, sweet, mellow voice was borne upon the clear spring air, full of feeling and pathos; a voice which caused you to pause and listen, whether you desired to do so or no.

“Tell me, oh! tell me, rose of the morn,

What whispers the dew, the dew on thy breast?

Tell me, oh! tell me, blossoming thorn,

Thy vows to the wind of the West?

Soft flowing river, seeking the sea,

What saith the moonlight, sleeping on thee?

‘Love,’ said the rose, and hawthorn of may,

And ‘Love,’ said the river, ‘for ever and aye.’”

And as the singer ceased, she stopped before an early rose, and gathering a bud; she

pressed her lips to it with childish fervour, and shook the dewdrops from its heart before she placed it in the bosom of her dress; and, like a butterfly, fluttered on to find another just as sweet.

And pausing before the single red hawthorn, she raised her hand to pluck a spray of the over-blown blossoms, causing a shower of crimson petals to fall around her; and she looked at the shattered may and laughed.

“You cannot tell me much now!” she cried, merrily. “Your day is over, and I am so sorry to lose you, beautiful hawthorn! I suppose I am so fond of you because I am named after you. You are a species of Nature’s godmother; but I hope my beauty will not shatter like yours, nor my hopes. Never mind; I have still my rose to consult;” and May Dalkeith seated herself on a rustic bench not far from the lake, amid the tall ferns, again to question the blossom, which she drew once more from its resting-place on purpose.

“Tell me, sweet rose,” she whispered, “what do all the beautiful things around me say? Surely they speak a language

which is new to me—one which I have not learnt—but still I think I know what it is.

"I wonder what love is like?" she continued, a dreamy look coming into the forget-me-not eyes. "How I should like to know! I love papa, of course; it is only natural that I should do so; but the love which the birds, and the flowers, and the sky, and the lake whisper about is nothing of that sort.

"Caring for my father does not make me glad. But they tell me of a strange, deep, wild joy, which is possible to the human heart. Shall I ever experience it, I wonder?"

And she sat with her small hands clasped over her knees, her dark-fringed blue eyes looking out over the water, when before her view there passed in the distance the punt which was usually moored beside the lake, with a picturesque-looking young fellow propelling it with more ease and grace than she had ever before seen; and, in truth, her experience had been buttressed—her own father, and his old gardener and groom combined (Thomas), being the sole exception, who, indeed, might be said to be the only two specimens of the other sex which she had ever known, or held any intercourse with.

For May Dalkeith had been brought to that spot when a young child, and had there been reared in absolute seclusion.

And she gazed with eager interest at the vision which had so suddenly arisen before her eyes.

The gentleman was a tall, slight, and, as has before been styled, picturesque man; with a dark green Tyrolean hat, and a broad ribbon, a black velvet coat, and an æsthetic-hued necktie, which hung in a sailor's knot over his shirt front untrammelled, for he wore no waistcoat.

And as she gazed, it seemed as though the words of her song were echoed in the distance, only that it was *continued*, not repeated, and came to her in a fine tenor voice.

"Tell me, oh! tell me, blush upon her cheek,
What makes thee as red, as red as the rose?
Tell me, oh! tell, for I know you can speak,
Sweet smiles, what your meanings disclose?
Eyes of my dear one, stars of my night,
What is your secret, beaming with light?
'Love,' said the blush and smile that she wore,
And 'love,' said her bright eyes, 'true love for evermore.'"

And he struck his pole firmly into the mud beneath the water, and moored the punt quietly and with easy self-possession in a good position to command a full view of May Dalkeith and the gabled cottage in the background; and having done so, he unpacked his easel, and set it up; arranged his canvas, and began his picture.

Had May understood etiquette she would most certainly have gone away at once from the reach of the artist's boldly-admiring eyes.

But it was a sealed book to her. She knew nothing whatever about it. "Mrs. Grundy," with her hard-and-fast rules, and subtle distinctions between what ought and what ought not to be, were a problem which had never been laid before her to solve.

She had led the free and easy life of a bird or a butterfly—a very solitary, but a perfectly untrammelled one. Her history was this.

Her father, Sir Roger Dalkeith, had for many years lived the life of a bachelor, and having nothing but his own pleasures to consider, he lived for himself alone, and became selfish and exacting.

Had Sir Roger loved and married as a younger man before his character had hardened into self-love, it is quite possible that things might have gone smoothly in his married life, and that the little edges which all newly-mated people discover in each other's dispositions, more or less, would have been rubbed down by the friction of daily intercourse; until Sir Roger and his wife, like other married people, would have run smoothly along the groove of matrimony.

As it was, the man's ideas were so firmly

fixed that nothing could move them. He looked upon his opinions as *law*, and all around him must obey that law. Unfortunately for Sir Roger, when Cupid did at length send an arrow quivering into his heart, he set his affections upon a woman twenty-five years younger than himself; and her will was every whit as strong as his own.

The result was, that instead of trying to mould her with gentleness to his ways, he attempted iron rule; and rank rebellion followed.

Three years after their marriage, Sir Roger and his wife separated legally, that general excuse, "incompatibility of temper," being the reason assigned. What effect this had upon the nature of his young wife Sir Roger never knew. He offered to make a settlement upon her from his splendid income, but Lady Dalkeith would accept *nothing*—notwithstanding the fact that she was absolutely penniless!

She was too proud to be indebted for anything to the man who she deemed loved her no longer, and to whom she positively declined to render wifely obedience.

Doubtless Sir Roger had found his wife very trying, after his many years of bachelorhood, without the faintest contradiction from those around him; but it is equally certain that her ladyship, with her fresh young feelings, found him as too; and the result he laid down for her guidance from her proud spirit into rebellion.

Lady Dalkeith, however, was very far from being the bad sort of woman her husband thought her. She had a powerful, generous nature, which, had it been turned into the right channel, would have rendered her a valuable companion and a good wife.

She was the sort of woman who would stick to a man through adversity, and prove a rock to him, if only he clasped hands with her as his equal and would lean upon her strength; but would never consent to take a "back seat," and be his obedient slave!

Sir Roger and his wife were, therefore, totally ill-matched, and the result of their incompatible dispositions has already been set forth. Up to the very last, disputes ran high between these ill-assorted people.

Lady Dalkeith wished to have the guardianship of her little daughter, their only child, and to this the Baronet would not consent.

Neither the law, nor her wishes, he told her, should make him give his little daughter into the keeping of a mother who, he persisted, was not fit to be her guardian and teacher.

So Lady Dalkeith, too proud to show her sorrow, or to accept anything from a man who could thus misjudge her, went out of his life—he knew not and cared not where—and she troubled him no more, unless memory may have grieved him by, against his will, reproducing her image, as it often does to those who arrive at that terrible stage of hating the being once so dearly loved.

As to Sir Roger, from the hour of their parting he was a misogynist.

He hated the very sight of all women, and his dealings with his child were oft-times tinged with the bitterness which was in his heart towards her sex.

There was never a day in which he did not wish that May was a boy.

He could scarcely forgive her for two things—that she was a girl, and that she was her mother's child.

Yet the natural affection in the heart of every parent fought a good fight with these unnatural feelings, and at times he was kind to the girl, and even companionable to her.

He educated her entirely himself.

Her store of learning was strange and varied, and very unlike what is taught to most girls, for Sir Roger was a bookworm, and brought before his young daughter often dry and far from interesting subjects.

Still, she found for herself other more congenial works upon the shelves of his well-stocked library, and these books may indeed be said to have been her friends.

With them she could exchange the thoughts which gathered in her mind, and which she would not have dared to reveal to her unsympathetic father.

She would read in their powerful words the outpouring of some great soul, and could whisper back her own shy thoughts to their pages as she could to no human ear.

Reading, music, painting, and nature, with its soft landscapes, its silent lake, and sweet sights and sounds, were May's pleasures and playground.

The birds and the flowers were her companions, and she conversed with them as we have heard her doing with the hawthorn, and the rose, as other girls chat with their friends.

May Dalkeith was now sixteen years of age, and had been thirteen years living at the gabled cottage that unnatural, monotonous life when this tale opens, and we find her sitting upon the rustic seat amidst the luxuriant ferns, looking at the artistic stranger with eager, wide-open eyes.

She never dreamed that the proper thing for her to do was to get up and go away.

She was greatly interested in the movements of this artist. He was a new page in the book of life for her.

CHAPTER II.

THE PICTURESQUE STRANGER.

MAY DALKEITH was, indeed, a beautiful subject for an artist to transfer to his canvas.

Tall, slight, and exquisitely moulded, with grace in every movement of the limber form, while her face was quite perfect in its own somewhat peculiar style and colouring.

Her hair was of the hue of a raven's wing, soft, waving and glossy like black; her forehead broad, intellectual and white, with straight, strangely pencilled brows; her complexion a pure pink and white, very seldom seen as an accompaniment to anything but auburn hair; her mouth was small and well-shaped, and strangely sensitive, as was also the scarlet-lined nostrils and the delicately-chiselled nose; but the great beauty of her face was her deep blue eyes, looking out from their wondrous background of dark-fringed lashes, clear and bright as twin stars in the arch of heaven.

And her beauty was enhanced by the coronet of hair, which gave a queenly pose to the shapely young head; and the soft, primrose-hued costume she wore, relieved here and there with black velvet and soft, white lace, suited her to perfection, the only colour about her of any decided nature being the crimson rosebud in the bosom of her dress, the half-out sleeves revealing the full beauty of the round white arms.

Guy Forrester, the artist in the punt, looked at her entranced.

He was not near enough to her to make an actual portrait, but he was not too far off to produce a really beautiful picture, and he knew it, hoping that by some good fortune he should yet be able to paint a full-sized portrait later on.

If the truth must be told, this young man's meeting with May Dalkeith was not quite so accidental as it appeared to be. Lake St. Ormo, and much land in its vicinity, was the property of Lord Rangor, a gay man of the world, who cared far more for the excitement of the race-course, and the brilliantly-lighted ball-rooms and theatres than for the greatest beauties of nature; and he very willingly let his pretty cottage there to Sir Roger Dalkeith thirteen years before, which had been built by his father to reside in during the fishing season, who was a patient follower of Isaac Walton.

But the old Lord was dead, and his son was far more fond of the fish of the gaming-table than those of the lake, and had never once been there since his boyhood.

In fact, he only remembered its existence

at the stated seasons when he received his rent from Sir Roger.

The rising young artist, Guy Forrester, chanced to be with him upon one of these occasions, and Lord Rangor turned to him with a smile.

"You don't know Fernshire, I suppose?" he said, and the artist shook his head.

"Romance is not in my line," he continued; "but if it were I should undoubtedly run down there."

"It is very much in mine," laughed the other. "What is to be seen there, Rangor?"

"Lake St. Ormo," he replied, and putting his cigar between his lips he lighted it, and then looked up with a mischievous glance. "You're an artist; won't that satisfy you?"

"Well, I confess if I were romance-hunting, it wouldn't. If I were merely seeking the picturesque, it might."

"You could, I fancy, combine amusement with art in this instance," laughed the older man.

"Thirteen years ago I let my house there to Sir Roger Dalkeith. You have heard of him, perhaps?"

"No, never!"

"I dare say not; men are soon forgotten, and I often forget his existence myself till I see his name upon his cheques every half-year. Sir Roger is in exile at St. Ormo."

"In exile? I don't quite understand."

"Self-elected exile, I must explain. He has done nothing very dreadful or unusual. He quarrelled with his wife, who, by-the-by, was a very jolly sort of woman—young and beautiful, and far too good for a rusty old skinflint like Dalkeith."

"However, she married him, either from that strange epidemical disease called love, or for the sake of his 'bawbees,' as they say in his own country; but whichever it was, she soon got sick of him, and after a short time they parted."

"He let his own place in Scotland and went off to St. Ormo, with his little daughter, and from all I can learn he has never left it since. Thirteen years is a good deal to add on to even a little girl's life, and Miss Dalkeith must be bordering upon womanhood now."

"There are reports from my agent that she is rarely beautiful too; but he has never seen her himself, and has the news second-hand from the lady who goes over from Grest Ormo to teach her to sing and play, and her opinions are fully corroborated by another who gives her lessons in drawing and painting. If it were at all in my line I would run down and try and get a sight of the little darling; but it is not. I prefer town."

"Rangor, you're a Goth!" replied the artist, smoothing his dark moustache with a caressing hand. "The whole story is delightful! Can't you give me permission to go down there to sketch?"

"Of course I can with pleasure. There's a punt on the lake, and from the water you will manage to get a good view of St. Ormo Cottage; but, my dear boy, I won't deceive you—you will not get inside it. Sir Roger Dalkeith closes his doors against all visitors! He is a perfect recluse. He considers his wife was imbued with all the deadly sins, poor soul! and for her sake he hates all mankind. I don't think he had any especially soft feelings towards his fellow-creatures before; but, woe! I believe he is a caution now. Anyway, I have neither liking nor respect for him. I don't pretend to be a saint; but I couldn't hazard my wealth, and live as though I had not five hundred a year, and let the woman I had promised, however unwisely, to shield through life, go out penniless into the world. I suppose I'm a bit of a rip, Forrester, but I couldn't do a thing of that sort."

"It's a nice life for the girl!" said the artist thoughtfully, passing over his friend's burst of righteous indignation, as though he had but small sympathy with his sentiment.

"It is as bad for her as being in a convent!"

"Worse, I should say," replied his lord-

ship between the whiffs from his cigar; "for the nuns are said to have a lark sometimes, and, even if that be untrue, the girls have each other for company, while Miss Dalkeith has only her father; and, judging by what he was in his palmy days, he must be something terrible in his gall and wormwood ones!"

"I think I'll go down," said Mr. Forrester, after a long pause in the conversation.

"To cheer the poor little dear!" laughed Lord Rangor. "Go by all means, dear boy, and if you can secure the heiress all the better for you; but I don't think you will get speech of her, although you may get sight. One thing it will be advisable to remember is, that Sir Roger is an awkward old fellow to tackle—a regular porcupine, with sharp quills all round, as poor Lady Dalkeith found to her cost, so you will have to be careful!"

"Trust me! But of one thing you may be sure, if I go, I both see her and speak to her; and if I like her—"

He stopped short.

"Out with it, Forrester; if you like her?"

"I shall not consult the grisly bear as to my choice of a wife, and I may yet introduce you to the recluse of St. Ormo!"

"You artists don't lose time," laughed his lordship, heartily. "My dear fellow, you may as well buy the ring before you go down!"

"Perhaps I may, who knows? But can you give me any information about Lady Dalkeith? I am interested to know what has become of her!"

"Ah! there I can't oblige you! There have been many reports about her, and probably none of them true! One thing, however, is quite certain; she left England, and I do not believe she has ever returned to the old country again. And now, what are your plans?"

"Oh! I really cannot tell you at present! Plans are not formed by magic! I suppose there is no question about the coin! I am not the sort of fellow to appreciate love in a cottage; and cannot accept the maxim that what is enough for one can be nearly stretched to maintain two! I don't certainly find I earn more than I want, and very often less; so you see a poor wife is not to be thought of."

"Oh! the money is right enough! Sir Roger is as rich as the proverbial Jew, and he has no other relations whatever to leave his wealth to. Even if he did not like his daughter marrying he would be sure to forgive her, for he is absolutely alone in the world; and, besides, living all these years with his beautiful daughter, he would not be human if he were indifferent to her happiness. That is my reading of the case!"

And the artist was satisfied; but neither he nor Lord Rangor really knew anything of the adamant character of the Baroness. Thus the sudden appearance of Guy Forrester, the artistic stranger, at Lake St. Ormo is accounted for, and the life of innocent, quiet monotony must become a thing of the past for May Dalkeith, who sat perfectly still, watching the movements of the artist with strong interest. She was especially fond of painting herself in her own small way, and quite longed to know how he was getting on with his work.

Towards noon Guy Forrester unmoored his boat, and propelled it towards the shore, and instinctively May felt it was time to move.

So she arose from her seat, and went away into a tiny summer-house amid the shrubs of the garden, and taking up a volume of Tennyson's poems, she was soon engrossed in the story of the love of Elaine for brave Sir Lancelot of the Lake, when there suddenly smote upon her ear a firm footstep crossing the winding gravel path which passed close to the summer-house.

Footsteps were unusual in that trim garden.

It certainly was not the old gardener's lagging gait she heard; and Sir Roger had left home that morning for the first time for thirteen years, with the admission that he could not tell when he should be back.

All May knew about it was, that while they were at dinner the night before, a telegram had come for her father, and, flinty though he was, it had undoubtedly caused an upheaval in the structure of his being.

He did not inform his daughter what the news was which had thus stirred him; but the following morning he came down to breakfast ready for a journey, and bade her farewell for an indefinite time.

May Dalkeith's feelings at finding herself alone were mixed and varied—a sense of loneliness and freedom combined.

When her father drove away in his small village cart her heart sank; but as soon as she came out into the sunshine among the flowers she forgot her loneliness.

Her pets of the feathered tribe came around her for their daily crumbs, and trilled their sweet songs to her, and she was soon as gay as the birds themselves, talking in her quaint manner to the flowers, watching the artist at his work, and reading her Tennyson, till she heard the advancing footsteps.

It could be neither her father nor Thomas. Who, then, could be coming her way?

Her heart was aching at that moment for Elaine in her sorrow and her deep, sad love; and it gave a strange and unusual bound as Guy Forrester stood before her, raising his hat to her with an easy grace all his own.

CHAPTER III.

A FIRST LESSON IN LOVE.

"PARDON me for this intrusion on your privacy," said Mr. Forrester, most politely; "but perhaps you will kindly inform me if I am right in thinking this is the cottage of Sir Roger Dalkeith? I have an introduction to him from Lord Rangor, his landlord, who is a great friend of mine, and who has given me permission to sketch all over his property."

"Oh dear! it is very unfortunate," answered May, looking up innocently into his face. "My father left home this morning, and I really do not know when he will be back."

"I am unlucky!" he exclaimed, with well-feigned vexation. "Can you not tell me at all when he will return? I conclude I have the honour of addressing Miss Dalkeith?" and he let his bold dark admiring eyes rest on her, till the colour glowed on her fair face.

"Yes, I am Miss Dalkeith," she answered; "but I really cannot give you any information about Sir Roger. I do not know where he has gone, or when he will return."

"Perhaps you will open Lord Rangor's letter?" he said, handing it to her with a bow.

But she shrank back.

"Oh! I could not, indeed! Papa is very particular; he would not like it at all. But if there is anything I can do to help you—" and she broke off suddenly, not knowing what to say.

But Guy Forrester was most ready to assist her. Her broken sentence was quite opening enough for him.

"Thank you!" he returned, with embarrassment. "To tell you the truth, it is only what I expected from your kind heart. Since your father is away, you can assist me very much. I am quite a stranger in those parts, and you are so isolated that I can find no one to apply to for help or information. I am to paint for Lord Rangor a series of sketches of his property, while I obtain for myself a few subjects for the art galleries next season; and so far I have been very fortunate. I have secured an exquisite one for my academy picture."

Still more intently he gazed at her, while her colour deepened to a richer hue.

"I will show you that sketch in a day or two when it is completed," he continued, "unless you would like to see it now."

"Oh, I should greatly!" she exclaimed,

jumping up with childlike eagerness. "I am so fond of painting!"

"I was unaware that I should have the pleasure of showing my work to a fellow-artist," he said, with pretended homage. "I hope you will honestly criticise it."

And he walked by her side towards the punt, where he had left all his things.

"Oh! I couldn't do that; I am but a beginner," she laughed. "I can scarcely paint at all yet, but I am very fond of it."

"You must allow me to be the judge of your talent, Miss Dalkeith," he said, with interest. "It is shown from the first if it exists, and, if not, it is quite useless to attempt to learn it."

"And will you really tell me the truth about my work?" she inquired excitedly. "I should be indeed glad to know if I am doing well. My mistress praises me, but father is quite silent when I show him my pictures. He is a clever man, you see, and a severe critic, and I am sure they do not please him."

"I feel certain they will *me*," he returned, softly. And he let a smile of encouragement rest upon his face, as he looked at her, ere he stooped, and drew the punt close to the bank.

"Will you mind stepping in?" he asked, quietly. "Then you will be able to see all the sketches I have with me," and he held out his hand to assist her, and the two were soon seated side by side in the punt, looking at the commencement of the picture in which she and St. Orme Cottage figured so conspicuously.

Guy Forrester was no mean artist, and May Dalkeith had never seen such work as his before. Every stroke of the brush had vigour and meaning, and she gazed at it with enchantment.

"And you have done all this this morning?" she asked, almost incredulously.

"Well, you have never seen me here before to-day. Now, have you?" he inquired, merrily.

"No, it was a silly question; but how can you paint so fast?"

"Well, you see, Miss Dalkeith, when a man is uncertain how soon he may lose his model, there is need of speed, is there not? Suppose you had run away before I had got in the second half of your face, there would have been too much left to the imagination. Now, don't you think so?"

And his handsome eyes were full of fun as he asked the question, and May broke into a silvery peal of laughter. Then he untied his portfolio, and displayed to her gem after gem of his own painting, and she sat feasting her eyes upon them with real pleasure.

"Oh! how I wish I were you," she cried. "How happy you must be, to excel in so Heaven-like an art!"

"Must I?" he replied, letting a strain of deep melancholy come into his voice.

"Are you not?" she continued, with surprise. "I am sure I should be if I could paint as you do."

"You are very young, Miss Dalkeith," he said, softly; "but by-and-by you may learn the lesson that art alone cannot satisfy the human heart, and that real happiness is not attained till the soul finds another which it can claim for its own. You were singing a very pretty song this morning, Miss Dalkeith, which asked many questions of the rose, and the river, and the birds, and of the whispering wind. Do you remember what was the answer to them all?"

"Yes," she said, gently. "I know; we all want love in our lives. I believe that is true; but surely you can have it if you like!" and she raised her great innocent blue eyes to his face.

"Can you?" he inquired, meeting their gaze fully, and absolutely riveting it by the strong magnetism of his will, while he laid his hand upon hers tenderly.

"I?" she returned, her colour coming and going fitfully at his touch and keen regard. "Oh! no, but my life is a strange and unusual one. I see no one at St. Orme; my father has given up the world."

"Why did he do that, Miss Dalkeith?"

"I cannot tell you, but I fancy it must have been when he lost my mother."

"Is she dead, then?"

Tears rushed to May's eyes.

"I suppose so," she answered, sadly. "I have but the dimmest recollection of a singularly beautiful face bending over me, and that must have been my mother's, I think; but papa will not allow me to mention her name, and I do so long to hear about her."

"Lord Rangor remembers her perfectly, and says she was a handsome and charming woman," said Guy Forrester, artfully.

"Oh! does he?" cried May, with suppressed feeling, her nostrils and lips quivering. "I felt certain of it; and I am, oh! so glad to have someone to speak to about my dear mother. Have you one? Mr. —, do you know I am not even aware of your name?"

"It is Guy Forrester," he returned, smiling; "and I ought to have told you before, but, somehow, to-day seems all sunshine, and I think it must have dazed me. I will learn the fullest particulars with regard to Lady Dalkeith if you will allow me; and, do you know, I feel sure Lord Rangor has a small photograph of her, and, if so, I will make a picture from it for you. I will write to his lordship about it this very afternoon."

"That is, indeed, kind of you," replied May, gratefully. "I do not know how to express my appreciation of your goodness."

"Do not try; it will be a real happiness to me to give you pleasure. Believe me, I would do anything for you. Miss Dalkeith, do you not think there is a sympathy between some souls, and when they meet they recognise the fact at once?" And again the dark, magnetic eyes were fixed upon hers, and commanded her acquiescence to his will, and her long-fringed lashes drooped over the sapphire blue eyes. "Won't you try and answer me?" he asked, with a sudden desire to see her lift them.

"I do not know," she faltered. "I have never heard anyone speak of such things before."

"Ah! I am glad of that," he retorted.

"Adam must have rejoiced to be the first to whisper the sweet language of love and sympathy to Eve—don't you think so? But Miss Dalkeith, you asked me if I could not have love if I liked. No, love is not born of the will. It comes into the soul like a sudden ray of light, and illumines the entire life; and without its influence the whole heart is barren and bare. You cannot have been more lonely in your seclusion than I have been in the gay world of fashion, among unsympathetic natures. Believe me, there is no loneliness like that felt in a crowd."

"I am sorry you have not been happy," said innocent May, kindly and tenderly. "Perhaps you will find your ideal some day!"

And Guy Forrester turned to her with a flash of gladness from his wonderful eyes, which brought a strange thrill through the young, fresh heart.

"I have found her, Miss Dalkeith," he replied, in a strongly-agitated voice; "but I cannot be happy until I know I shall win her—and I cannot ask her that yet."

His words might have meant anything, but the look in his eyes and the tone of his voice could mean but one.

And innocent and unsophisticated May Dalkeith, who had lived her strange, unreal, dreamy life, picturing to herself the beauties of unknown love, felt that it had come to her as well as to him. And she sat very still, listening to the sweet music of his heart.

Very, very happy, without one thought or care—one question or suspicion.

While the artist looked at her, admiring her beauty and smiling at the innocence of the little *ingenue*, and the lack of difficulty in winning her and her money bags; absolutely amused at her faith in the exquisite sentiments he had placed before her, which, although he found useful in making love (in

which capacity he very often brought them to the front) never had birth in the heart of Guy Forrester, who was a veritable Bohemian in life and feelings, and looked upon elevated sentiments as only fit for the pulpit or the stage.

Very shyly the girl glanced at the handsome face bending over her, and recognised the fact of its great beauty.

The eyes, as before stated, were large and dark, and filled with a mesmeric power, which gave the man an almost irresistible influence over women.

The forehead was a fine one, denoting ability, while a few waves of dark hair fell upon it and about his neck, for Guy Forrester affected a thoroughly artistic style, as do many of his profession.

His other features were also decidedly good, if not altogether of the best type.

The nose was aquiline, the mouth well-shaped but a trifle sensual, the moustache black, and silky in texture, the complexion of a clear olive hue; the chin lacking in manly strength, as were the white and even teeth which glittered in the sunshine.

Yes, May thought him very handsome indeed! He was quite her ideal of what a man should be; and he was perfectly aware that such was the case, for it was not the first time Guy Forrester had played upon a woman's heart, and produced sweet music therefrom; but never before had he found one so white and pure and unsuspecting, one which was so ready to believe in him with such child-like faith.

A better man would have hesitated to deceive such a girl. Not so selfish, pleasure-seeking Guy Forrester.

His opinion of womankind was not an especially elevated one. The fair sex, he considered, were pretty toys made for the amusement of the great mogul—man!

The more beautiful they were the more they amused; but, at the same time, if his taste were really consulted, he loved a spice of *diablerie* in a girl, and a few tormenting tricks to enchain his fickle fancy.

As an artist, he was thoroughly satisfied with May Dalkeith.

She was, he acknowledged, as beautiful as a dream of springtide; but, as a man, she did not satisfy him in the least. She was too gentle, too yielding, too believing, too good altogether.

Nevertheless, it was no difficulty whatever to him to make love to her. It rather amused him than otherwise to watch the sweet strain of young love awaking in her maiden heart, and to listen to its music, and he decided that it would be pleasant to be the envied possessor of so beautiful a wife; and he well knew that her face was one to create a *furor* in the circles of the best society into which her position and wealth must safely carry him, instead of standing, as he now did, upon its bright border of golden tinsel.

Yes, he decided that he would win May Dalkeith, and wed her too!

(To be continued.)

A COURT ROOM IN CHINA.—In the magistrate's dirty court room the prisoners are brought in, tried, tortured if they refuse to confess, sentenced and punished with a despatch that is in admirable contrast to the deliberations of our enlightened courts. If the real offender cannot be found, they seize upon one of his relatives and hold him for hostage. It is generally a poor relation, and the longer he stays in jail the better his family prospers. The mandarins are inclined to look leniently on any who are willing to pay their way out of jail, or pay a substitute who will be caught and imprisoned for them, so that in the small number of its fettered prisoners Canton stands well a comparison with civilized, law-abiding communities a third of its size.

JUDITH.

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CHAPTER XXVII.—(continued.)

"It seems too wonderful," Mr. Holt wrote, "that, big though the world may be, it is yet small enough to admit of a meeting between you and the man who injured you beyond forgiveness. For it is of you only I think now; my own wrongs I can ignore, but that you should have been, through Collett's villainy, sent out into the world friendless and forlorn I can never forget."

"Should your surmises prove correct I will become a fatalist at once, and firmly believe henceforth that as the blood of Abel cried for vengeance from the ground, so all crime is bound to be discovered in the end, no efforts, no hiding-place suffering to escape from the consequences of sin—its just punishment."

"I am writing to catch the mail, and having by some mishap only received your letter to day, have had no time to think how best to advise you. I must speak to Avon, and when we have decided what is the right course to pursue will write again. But that means a whole week's delay, and if once that scoundrel gets a scent of his danger he will be off, and certainly give no such an opportunity again."

"Should you consider it better to act at once, lay the matter before Mr. Sherston. He being a civilian, and experienced probably in such cases, will know and tell you what to do."

"You ask for a photograph of Matthew Collett. I have never seen one, and do not think it probable he would allow to be extant such fatal evidence against him, for it is unlikely that his offence against me was his first, nor, I am sure, was it unpremeditated. He would be certain to take all possible precautions."

"However, by great good luck, as I started to write this who should come in but young Clinton, of the Foreign Office (formerly your admirer, and especially famous as a first-class caricaturist—a fact you may remember). It appears he met Collett once or twice, and being struck with his peculiar and most villainous physiognomy, made two or three attempts at a sketch of him, all more or less successful, and the best of which I enclose."

"Such marked features, and so diabolical an expression it would be almost impossible to mistake; but, dear child, let me implore you to do nothing rash, nor risk drawing down upon yourself a desperate enmity by making an accusation about which there is any doubt. Unless absolutely confident of success do nothing. Even to me, who wish to believe what you have told me, it seems improbable without you should have come upon the man, any effort of your own; and even supposing thus it had happened so, would not your name, the knowledge of who you were, have frightened him away before this?"

The letter did not end there, but Judith went no further.

She was too excited, too eager to see the sketch and judge for herself whether her suspicions had any foundation at all.

Unfolding a sheet of paper that had remained in the envelope, she gazed at it a moment, then started to her feet, and a faint cry of conviction escaped her lips.

Feature for feature the spirited likeness she held agreed with the lineaments of the man she was anxious to denounce; only the hair was different, and that she easily understood could be altered to suit his pleasure.

Wonderful, improbable as it doubtless was, it was also true that Fate, playing into her hands, had brought them together, and nothing seemed to remain for her to do but to say out all she knew to condemn and crush him beyond all hope of revival!

With lips compressed, and flashing eyes, she had made a movement to go to the house before she saw that Mr. Sherston stood before her, and was watching her intently.

"I wanted to see you!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Long ago I made a statement which you disbelieved. May I prove it to you now?"

"I shall be most happy to listen to what you have to say."

"I told you then that Mr. Johnson was an impostor. I told you that under another name he had defrauded my father and others of large sums of money; that he was a swindler, an adventurer, and under no circumstances fit to come into the presence of Winifred, much less to aspire to be her husband!"

"I remember your making some very wild statements. Is it possible you think that you can prove them?"

"Think! I know it! Look there, Mr. Sherston!"

She held the paper before his eyes, her finger shaking so that he had to steady it with his own hand as well.

"Look there! That is the face of the man who ruined us ten months ago! Can you deny it is the face of Mr. Johnson, too?"

He pretended to gaze at it deliberately, as though weighing the matter in his mind, with the view of coming to an incontestable decision; but, in reality, after the first quick glance, everything swam before his eyes, and he was only considering how best to dissuade Judith from prosecuting the advantage she had gained.

Not a doubt remained but that Johnson was guilty of this as well as the fault in which he himself had been implicated; but how was it possible to use this knowledge?

Could he employ it as a threat to ensure his own safety, or were their interests too closely allied for there to be any question of a struggle between them?

Was it a fact, as Johnson had confidently asserted, that they must stand or fall together, and that so long as they both should live, he, the weaker spirit, must remain in subservience to the stronger nature of this man, who feared nothing, had stopped at no crime that could serve his own schemes?

In any case, it was clear to him that he must, if possible, keep the power in his own hands, and by no means allow Judith to hold such a winning card.

"Do you see that I am right?" asked the girl, impatiently.

He allowed his gold-rimmed glasses to drop, and, drawing the paper away from her, folded it up in thoughtful silence.

"There is a strong resemblance. I can understand your being struck by it," he said, presently, when, her eyes still fixed questioningly upon his own, she waited for him to speak.

"Nothing more than that?"

"Nothing more!" easily; misled by the quietness of her tone.

"Then I think you must be wilfully blind! There is some reason why you should wish to shield that wretch!"

Her voice rang out resolute and clear, with an accent of power, for which Mr. Sherston was by no means prepared, though he tried to appear at ease still, and, as a precautionary measure, put away the sketch carefully in his pocket.

"That is mine!" she cried, stretching out her hand.

"Pardon me. Such an accusation as you have made cannot so lightly be set aside. Mr. Johnson is my guest. It is my business to clear his character, and I shall not rest till I can refute all you have said. This sketch, which may or may not be a likeness of the person for whom it is intended, must remain in my possession, certainly for the present."

Conscious of the strong position he held, Mr. Sherston's manner was perfectly assured, and rebellious as Judith felt, she knew no objection would avail.

"What are you going to do?" she questioned, obstinately.

"In the first instance, I shall ask him point blank where the last two years of his

life were spent; and he must prove to me beyond a doubt that he is speaking truth."

This sounded reasonable enough, and at first Judith could find no apposite reply.

"But supposing," she said, eventually, very slowly and deliberately, "that what satisfied you did not satisfy me?"

"I should regret it extremely, more especially as I should always expect those living in my house to respect my judgment and abide by my decision," he returned, with cold politeness.

Judith bit her lips as she realised the hopelessness of her struggle, her own folly in allowing the proof she had possessed against Johnson to pass out of her hands. She sighed deeply, and the Commissioner, who was a kind man at heart, felt ashamed of the victory he had gained, sorry for her disappointment. He laid his hand upon her shoulder gently.

"Believe me, I will do my best for us all; but you must reconcile yourself to the fact that it is useless fighting against great odds; any battle in which a woman engages must be an unequal one. Try to overcome your enmity to Johnson. Whatever he has done in the past he is strong enough to defend in the present. You will gain no good by trying to prove anything against him; your efforts may end in your own discomfiture."

"I am fighting for your daughter, not for myself!" she reminded him, reproachfully.

"To rescue her from such an unhappy marriage I am prepared to risk something!"

"You will do no good, no good!" he muttered awkwardly, and hurried away.

He went through the verandah into the long corridor, and scarcely noticing where his footsteps led him, walked straight into his wife as she came out of a small room which commanded a view of that part of the garden where he and Judith had been talking for the last half hour.

She had witnessed the scene from the beginning to the end, understanding that it had had some serious import, and noticing, with jealous eyes, the friendly touch upon the shoulder with which he had tried to soothe the girl's excitement. Now, white with rage, she confronted him.

"You must not stop me, Bella; I am busy," he observed, quickly, feeling certain from her attitude that something had gone wrong.

"Not too busy to talk to that girl," with infinite contempt expressed in the preposition.

"My dear, you do not understand."

"I understand well enough," she interrupted. "I understand that latterly you seem to have forgotten you have a wife whose presence in your house you are bound to respect—if no other consideration has any weight."

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean?" she retorted. "You have outraged my pride, wounded my affections, ignored me altogether. It is cruel! shameful!"

He stared at her in speechless surprise, bewildered by her words as well as by her unusual demonstration; not comprehending in the least what had caused them both. His first thought was to avoid a scene, and he pushed her gently back into the room she had just quitted.

"Come in here and explain yourself, quietly. What is it I have done?" he asked.

"You think I have neither eyes nor ears. That you never loved me I know, but it is only lately that you have attempted to let other women fill the place that is mine by right. I tell you prevarication is useless. I know that Mrs. Trevor visited you at your office last week, and remained with you alone, for more than an hour. I was witness to your interview with Miss Holt just now."

"If you had heard every word that passed," he began, helplessly.

"But I did not hear. I was not even meant to know, probably, that these meetings had ever occurred; but having become aware of them, I warn you solemnly that I will not submit

tamely to such insults. I will resent them without a doubt."

She had drawn herself up primly, and her hard features might have been cut from wood or stone, so imperious did they seem to any softening influence. It seemed impossible to connect them with any emotion—even jealousy, the least lovely of them all.

"Pshaw! my dear, you are talking nonsense, and you know it," said her husband, impatiently. "I am beyond the age for such follies, as you might guess, and even if it were not so, it would be ridiculous for you to pretend to care. We married without love, and, if since then we have discovered our mistake, at least in common decency let us conceal the fact, even from each other."

"You mean you regret our marriage?" with a break in her voice he was too irritated to note.

"If I have to make you happy certainly I do."

"Perhaps," satirically, "you wish you had married someone else?"

"Perhaps I do," he retorted, goaded beyond endurance by her manner, and the tone she had adopted.

Gathering her skirts around her, as though to avoid the slightest contact, and flashing at him a single glance of unutterable wrath, she swept from the room; and he heaved a sigh of relief, too delighted to be freed from the aggravation of the attack to consider the coat at which he had gained a respite.

So serious was the danger to which he was now exposed that this ebullition of his wife's seemed of little consequence; nor did he dream for a moment that she seriously believed she had real cause for jealousy or anger.

Her tempers had been too frequent, and often to groundless, for him to feel disturbed at this, and he was only too glad that she was gone, leaving him to think over all that had happened that morning—Johnson's threats, and Judith's quieter determination to succeed in what she had undertaken.

The former might be won over if he chose to give in to him, and consider their interests identical, as in fact they were. The latter would, he felt sure, do what she considered right, at whatever cost.

If only she had never entered their house; if only she could be got out of the way, so that they need fear her no more.

A touch on his arm startled him, and turning he saw his wife had returned, and was looking sternly at him.

"Julius," she said, authoritatively, "after what you have said, there is only one course open to us. The girl must go!"

"What girl?" he questioned, feebly.

"Judith Holt. She and I can never live under the same roof again!"

He burst into a harsh laugh, then began a half-careless disclaimer, the fault of which he was supposed to be guilty seeming too ridiculous to be confuted in sober earnest.

A second thought restrained him. If his wife believed him to be in love with Judith she would certainly find an excuse for getting rid of her at once, thus relieving him from the onus of an act that would doubtless be insisted on by Johnson when informed of the circumstances of this last interview.

It was imperative the girl should go; she knew too much, and would dare too much for Winifred's sake. Why should not her departure be based on this ground as well as on any other?

For a second he hesitated, finding it difficult to credit that Mrs. Sheraton could possibly be blind to the absurdity of her own accusation. Then he declared with well-acted reluctance,—

"You are right. It is better she should go!"

So Judith's fate was sealed!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONLY FEVER.

THE fever which had prevented Winifred going to Mrs. Hare's picnic, and which had been treated very lightly, proved to be more serious than at first supposed. When, after three days, it refused to succumb to the ordinary course of quinine, the Commissioner deemed it necessary to send for the doctor, who shook his head, and reiterated his former opinion.

"The girl had no constitution whatever, and should not be in India a day longer than absolutely obliged to remain. At present, he believed it to be simply fever from which she was suffering, but she was very weak, and seemed to have no spirit to combat with any ailment, however slight."

This last symptom Judith had also noticed, and grew alarmed as another day passed, and there was still no perceptible improvement in her state.

Fever is such an invidious disease, and, creeping on so quietly and painlessly, still manages to sap away all energy and strength, leaving its victim utterly prostrate for the time, and weaker after each attack.

Winifred had been confined to her room for nearly a week, when, struck by her frail appearance, Judith resolved to speak, and did so, sharply.

"You don't try to get well; it makes me miserable to see you lying there, scarcely ever sleeping and only taking a spoonful of soup when I make you swallow it. That jelly has been by your side all day, and you have not touched a mouthful."

"I have so much inducement to get well," with bitter emphasis.

"Winifred, how can you be so wicked? Have you no faith?"

"I have no hope, which is the same thing."

"But you must hope; you must have faith that such a sacrifice will never be permitted. No one can force you to marry the man."

"Next Tuesday is my wedding-day."

"That will be postponed, of course, even if not put a stop to altogether. I cannot believe that your father will allow—"

"He cannot help himself—nor me," interrupted Winifred, in tones which, to the other, sounded pitifully weak.

She returned, quickly,—

"But Mr. Johnson must be made to listen to reason. He must release you when he knows how you hate him—how terrible such a marriage must be!"

Winifred shook her head sadly.

"He has no mercy—none. If it suited his purpose he would marry me—on my death-bed."

"Oh! hush!" cried Judith, sharply.

The word had struck her with a strange chill, and made her mute from the horror of a hitherto unacknowledged fear.

Was it so bad as this? Was Winifred really going to die, and die because living was too hard a task under the cruel circumstances of her fate? Nervously she stole a glance at her, and could gather no consolation from what she saw.

Flushed and weary from the late discussion she lay back on her pillows with eyes half closed, her dry lips parted; while on the coverlet one hand was lying white and painfully thin.

Judith went forward and touched it; it was burning hot, and the girl shivered nervously, and opened her eyes with a start.

"Go to sleep, dear, and I will stay with you. I will do all I can for you. I will save you if possible, I promise," whispered Judith, earnestly; and, too exhausted to reply, Winifred sank presently into an easy slumber.

Half-an-hour later Mrs. Sheraton came in and began talking about some outside matter, until Judith put up her hand to entreat silence.

"She is asleep," she said, in a low voice.

"Nonsense!" sharply. "Her eyes are half open. She is a little tired, I daresay."

"She always sleeps like that now. I think it must be weakness. Mrs. Sheraton, she is very ill."

"Weak, of course, but, after all, it is only fever. There is no danger."

"Are you sure of that? Just now she talked of dying, and I think she does not care to live."

"Not care to live!" repeated Mrs. Sheraton, in horrified surprise.

Judith only paused a moment, during which she had resolved to appeal for assistance.

After all, hard and crochety as the woman was, she was the girl's mother, and surely had a right to know of her unhappiness, and to help her to escape from it if possible.

"It is true what I say. Winifred would rather die than marry Mr. Johnson. She only consented to please her father—to save him, I believe, from some threatened danger; and now she finds the promise she made more than she can fulfil. It is breaking her heart; it will kill her if someone does not interfere."

She was trembling with excitement, and for the moment she carried her hearer away with her, for at heart the Commissioner's wife was not so hard, not so emotionless as in outward seeming.

She loved her daughter, though she made no profession of her affection, often finding fault with her and twitting her with her non-success in society.

It had been a bitter disappointment to her when, five years ago, Winifred had come out to India, pale and spiritless, with no brilliant qualities to redeem the plainness of her features.

Then came her attachment to young Stamer, who had neither birth nor wealth, nor even good looks to recommend him; while, since that time, no other suitor had offered himself. And having no longer any pride in the girl, nor hope of her making any better match, Mrs. Sheraton had been very willing to sanction his attentions; but now a motherly tenderness—only dormant in her nature, not extinct—made her doubt whether, after all, her first duty was to the world.

Surely it was better that she should bear the onus of possessing an unmarried daughter to the end of her days than that Winifred's happiness, perhaps her life, should be imperilled.

Her face softened wonderfully as she half decided to interpose in her behalf—if, indeed, it were true that she could never care for Mr. Johnson, nor even endure his love for her.

Judith saw the change in her expression, and bent eagerly forward to press her advantage.

"You will do what you can?" she urged, imploringly.

Very often, when our intentions are best, our actions are the less calculated to gain our ends—a look too long, a movement too impulsive, defeating the object we had in view.

So it was in this case.

The beautiful face, so close now to her own, the soft sweet voice, as she pleaded earnestly, seemed to turn the woman's heart to adamant. She could not have yielded gracefully even had she felt inclined, while a moment's reflection decided her; it was better to resist, not to countenance such folly.

"My husband and I can judge what is best for our daughter. She has never complained to us."

"She never will!" broke in Judith.

"Then we can only infer that she is content with matters as they are, and that you have grossly exaggerated the circumstances of the case," was the cold, inflexible reply.

"Oh! Surely you can see for yourself. No words are needed to tell you she is not happy."

"I am afraid I have not so highly strung an organisation, nor such keenly imaginative powers as you."

Her hatred of the girl was shown so plainly, so unapologetically, that it was impossible to mistake her meaning, much less ignore it.

Judith gave a faint gasp, and stood, staring

at her for a moment, utterly perplexed as to the cause of it, though aware that some crisis was impending. Then, with a deep sigh, she turned away and moved towards the door.

"Where are you going?" she questioned sharply.

"I—I don't know."
"I think I do. You are going to Mr. Sherston."

"If I thought it would do any good—"
"Whether it would or no, I forbid you to speak to him on that or any other subject, and while you remain an inmate of my house I expect you to obey my wishes."

Her naturally shrill-toned voice rose almost to a scream in her jealous rage, and roused Winifred, who moved and moaned faintly.

Mrs. Sherston gave her some soup, and sat down in the chair beside her bed, with her back turned towards Judith, who stood irresolute for some moments, then went out, closing the door softly.

Outside in the corridor she hesitated again. Mrs. Sherston had absolutely forbidden her to speak to the Commissioner; yet how else could she fulfil her promise to Winifred?

It was her only hope, and surely not an unfounded one—that when he understood how critical was his daughter's case he would decline to accept such a sacrifice at her hands.

She must see him, pray to him, whatever the consequences might be.

Not for an instant did she underrate the serious nature of Mrs. Sherston's threat, though quite unable to account for her displeasure; nor had she misunderstood the hint conveyed in her last sentence.

It was this decided her, if, indeed, any impetus were needed to persuade her to pursue what she considered the right course.

As, in any case, she was to be sent away, it mattered little if her departure were precipitated or no. She would certainly take her chance of that.

Hastily crossing to the door of Mr. Sherston's private room she knocked, asked for, and obtained admission to enter. Then, being once inside, stood silent, half frightened at her own temerity.

The Commissioner's face scarcely encouraged her to proceed; any visitor would have been unwelcome at that moment, and most of all the girl who had proved so disturbing an element lately in his life.

The fear that had come into Judith's mind had also struck him for the first time that very day. That very morning, standing by her bedside, he had asked himself whether Winifred were not seriously ill; and again, whether, if she died, he would not be responsible for her death.

A moment before he had taken up his pen to write to Johnson, but the paper lay before him blank still, for he could find no words to frame a request that even in his own heart was blurred and indistinct.

What was it he really wanted?

Was he brave enough to face the effects of such a letter as alone could suffice to free his daughter from the chains that had been involuntarily forged?

It was this doubt that had made him hesitate; and as Judith entered he waited for her to speak, allowing his manner to signify the annoyance he felt at the intrusion.

"It is about Winifred I wanted to talk to you," she began.

"Is she worse?" he interrogated, quickly, and as he asked the question became aware how great had been his anxiety, how cruel would be the blow were the answer to be "Yes."

"It is impossible for me to say. I only know she is no better, and seems very weak, very nerveless. It seems to me that she does not want to recover; that is why I came to you."

His face betrayed so keen an interest in her words that she went on more fluently.

"I have no right to speak to you of this at all. You are her father, and her happiness is surely more to you than it can ever be to me,

who loves her very dearly too. But it is my duty to tell you what I know—know from her own lips—that so long as living means marrying Mr. Johnson, she would rather die."

"She told you that?"
Judith nodded gravely.

"Then you think this engagement should be cancelled at all hazards?"

"I do not presume to advise you. I only tell you the plain fact as I heard it an hour ago. You know best what induced her to make the promise—you know if it can be broken. I am almost in the dark, but I could not stand aside to see her sinking so day by day, and not make an effort to save her. It is terrible to see her suffering, and always trying so bravely to conceal her pain from you. Oh! it is true, for I have seen it in her face. That marriage with that man would be worse to her than death!"

Before Mr. Sherston's mental vision rose Winifred's face as he had seen it that morning, the deep sadness in her eyes, while her lips smiled; and the thought struck him that were he to persist in his scheme of self-preservation he would be killing her as surely as though he struck a knife into her heart.

Tears of compunction sprang into his eyes, and rising from his seat he seized Judith's hand and wrung it cordially.

"I thank you, Miss Holt, for your plain-speaking; it has done its work. Winifred shall be made happy this very day, let who will suffer in her stead!"

He spoke with impulsive warmth, and Judith had never liked him so well, never respected him so much, though she said no word, only looked her gratitude and gladness; indeed, there was no more to say, her mission being ended, and successfully so.

Left alone, the Commissioner's enthusiasm slowly died out, and he realised what he had done, though not repenting it. He would not go back from his word, but he knew what was involved in the keeping of it, and that even though Winifred were saved in one way, she was ruined in another, since what affected him affected his family as well.

For about the twentieth time he dipped his pen in the ink, and this time the words flowed freely enough; his mind being once made up he was perfectly reckless of results.

He was more than half way through his letter, when another rap came to the door. Reluctantly again, he said, "Come in."

This time it was Mr. Johnson who entered, and the Commissioner let his pen fall, and moved restlessly in his seat.

"I hope I do not disturb you?" said the intruder, suavely.

"I was writing to you then; perhaps what I wished to tell you can be settled best by word of mouth."

A keen, inquiring glance was darted from between Mr. Johnson's half-closed eyes.

He paused, and then, with intention, ignoring what had been said, he went on pleasantly,—

"The mail has just come in, and there is something here that will interest you. Let me be the first to congratulate—Sir Julius Sherston!"

He held out the newspaper smiling; and hastily snatching it away, the Commissioner assured himself that it was no joke, but an undoubted fact, that the honour expected and desired so long was conferred upon him at last. He read the paragraph over twice, then looked up to find the other's gaze bent full upon him.

"Well, Sir Julius, and what is that you have to say to me?" he asked, smiling still, but not pleasantly.

The newly-made K.C.S.I. fidgeted and fumbled with the paper he still held, like any schoolboy going to his master with an unlearned lesson.

Was it a device of the devil to lure him from the right path that this coveted title should be assured to him at the very moment when he had firmly resolved to give up all

prospects of worldly advancement for his daughter's sake?

With a desperate effort he replied, with apparent composure,—

"It is about Winifred I wished to speak to you. She is seriously ill, and I have only too grave cause to believe that her engagement to you is preying on her mind, and preventing her recovery."

"And what is it you wish me to do?"
"I ask you to release her from it."

"Anything else you may claim I will not refuse, any sum of money, any—anything I do not want, in fact. Pshaw, my dear Sherston, you are too amusing, but unhappily I am not in the humour for such a jest. A bargain is a bargain, and I insist upon ours being ratified. Nothing else will content me."

"And if I refuse to fulfil my part of it?"

An evil glimmer came into Mr. Johnson's near-set eyes, his brows met in a portentous frown as he answered, slowly,—

"Then you must be prepared for the consequences! I warn you I shall have no mercy! I will denounce you to the Government, and clear myself!"

His words were not without their effect.

The Commissioner became as white as death, his lips working painfully, while instinctively one hand was thrown over the letter he was writing to cover its contents.

He knew what it was he had promised to give up, how dear to him would be the honour only now received, how welcome to his wife; and yet it must be put aside, and with it all he had enjoyed so long, and for the pleasure of a foolish child, who, perhaps, did not know her own mind, and who might even (so variable are women) reproach him some day for his action in the matter.

It was very easy to persuade himself, as he thought it over, that Winifred was not so ill as he had imagined, only more obstinate; and, having got so far, not difficult to advance a step further, and decide that Judith was endeavouring to serve her own interests; that vindictive hatred of the man who, it seemed probable, had injured her deeply, not pity for Winifred, had prompted her appeal.

Such specious arguments could not but influence a mind only too eager to be convinced.

He had got his answer ready even before Mr. Johnson asked the definite question.

"Well, what have you settled to do?"

"I suppose the matter had better be left as it is now. When Winifred recovers she will be your wife."

He did not look up as he spoke. His eyes seemed glued to the ground, and a deep flush suffused his forehead. But Johnson was content to leave well alone, and took no notice of either symptom of shame.

With a few words, expressing his satisfaction at the agreement to which they had come, he withdrew, and the wretched man was left once more to himself, to think over what he had done, and the ignoble motives that had caused his decision.

Later in the day Judith received a note from him as she was going to Winifred's room, which came with the stunning force of an actual blow.

It ran as follows,—

"DEAR MISS HOLT,—I spoke impulsively and without thought when you came to me this morning. Since then, sober reflection has assured me that any change is impossible, that Winifred must abide by the promise she made of her own free will. Requesting that the subject may not be re-opened,—Sincerely yours,
"JULIUS SHERSTON."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"SAVED!"

WHEN Judith read Mr. Sherston's note, without a moment's hesitation she turned and went back to her room.

She felt she could not face Winifred as

matters were; a little suspense would be better for her, surely, than a state of hopelessness. Moreover, she had not the courage to tell her outright that she had done what she could to save her—and failed.

All night long she listened to the sounds that came through the door that divided the sick-room from her own, and guessed that they were getting alarmed about Winifred, and convinced at last it was not a simple case of fever.

Early in the morning the doctor came, and as he was going out Judith intercepted him in the passage.

"Tell me?" she said, abruptly. "How is she now?"

"Very ill, very weak and ill. Unless a great change occurs she cannot live another day; she has no stamina at all."

He spoke gravely, and with no exaggeration of manner.

To Mr. and Mrs. Sherston he had not been so explicit, but to her he thought he might speak the whole truth, as she was no connection—only an outsider.

He was startled, and repented his candour when he saw the ashen pallor that spread over the girl's face; and hastened to add, in extenuation of his words,—

"Of course, she is very young, and youth is always in one's favour. What has struck me most since I have been attending her is her listlessness. It reminds me more of a person ending life than one only at its commencement."

"I am not sure that life ends at any particular age," said Judith, sadly.

The doctor scrutinized her keenly.

"Is that it?" he asked, a look of intelligence creeping slowly over his heavy features. "I was wondering whether any sentimental trouble were at the bottom of her strange apathy? If that be so, my interference can do little or no good. It is mental medicine she wants, and if her parents wish to save her life they must tell her at once she may marry the man she loves, whoever he is; another day, and it may be too late. She is literally fretting herself into the grave."

He bustled away, as he spoke, with a cheery nod and a smile, in spite of the serious nature of his communication.

Having for many years been inured to the mysteries of life and death they had lost their solemnity to him. He could go straight from the most harrowing scene to his game of tennis or a rubber of whist, and enjoy either.

Not so Judith. She had only room for the one thought, that there was a chance still Winifred might get well, if only she were told that recovery meant freedom, not a bondage worse than death.

The doctor's words, though he had mistaken the facts of the case, seemed plainly to imply so much, and bitterly she regretted she had failed in her endeavour; that now nothing remained for her to do; that her promise must be unredeemed to the end.

A little later she went into Winifred's room. She was lying, white and passive, on her pillows, one blue-veined hand resting caressingly on Dandy's silky head; but she looked round when she heard Judith's step.

For full a moment she gazed at her, trying to read all that was in her face; then, as it became clear to her and clearer still that there was no hope—absolutely none—her eyelids dropped, and she gave a little weary sigh.

"I think she is unconscious," whispered Mrs. Sherston, momentarily forgetting her animosity in natural anxiety.

Judith shook her head.

"She is very weak—too weak to speak, perhaps, but she knows everything—everything—I am afraid!"

"What do you mean?" sharply.

Judith made no reply.

It was useless answering such a question, since it seemed an indisputable fact that the effect of any appeal that she might make would be neutralised at once by Johnson's influence.

It was he who held the girl's fate in his hands, and who might save her yet, if only he were persuaded that perseverance in his scheme could do him no good now, that to temporise was the best plan, for his own sake as well as hers.

In a low voice she questioned Mrs. Sherston where Mr. Johnson was then, and heard, in return, that he had gone out on some important business, and was not expected back before evening.

All day long she remained with Winifred, nursing her with sisterly tenderness, striving to infuse new strength into the enfeebled frame, new hope into her heart.

Mrs. Sherston had gone to lie down, having been up all night, and the two were alone most of the day; but Winifred never spoke, only looked at her with her big eyes gratefully, sorrowfully, with all the pathos of a dumb animal in pain.

And all day long Dandy lay beside her, waiting patiently for her to move, making no attempt to go without her, whining wistfully now and then, as though conscious that all was not going on well with his mistress, perhaps sensible, too, of his own impotence in the matter. It was growing dusk, when Judith saw Mr. Johnson pass the window on his way to his own room.

Winifred was sleeping, so she could leave her without compunction, calling to Mrs. Sherston as she passed her door to tell her she would be away for the next half hour.

Then, having determined in her own mind what she was going to do, she went on and knocked boldly at Mr. Johnson's door.

He came and opened it himself, his face expressing intense surprise as he saw who it was.

"Is Winifred worse?" he asked, quickly.

"She is very ill indeed. Can I speak to you a moment, Mr. Johnson?"

"I am always at your disposal. Where shall we talk? I am afraid there is not much privacy outside here in the corridor," as first one servant and then another passed down.

"The drawing-room?"

"I left Sir Julius writing letters there. Will you come into my room?"

Without hesitating she complied, standing near the door, and impatiently declining the chair he pushed forward for her acceptance.

"What I have to say will not take long," she told him. "Mr. Johnson, have you any idea how ill Winifred is?"

"I know that she is worse to-day—very weak—and has taken very little nourishment, her father says."

"The doctor said this morning she was dying."

Though he attempted to conceal it, Judith saw that her words were to him a surprise—a shock.

As he lifted his hands to stroke down his moustaches—a favourite action with him, when he wished to hide the expression of his mouth—he saw his fingers trembling, and took courage to go on.

"There was only one hope of saving her life, he thought, and now it may be too late for even that to do any good. He said if she were free from anxiety she might regain her strength."

"And how do you propose to ease her mind?" he asked, a cynical smile dawning on his lips, believing that he understood now the motive of her visit.

"It is you who can do that by releasing her from her engagement. Tell her that, so far as you are concerned, her father is safe, and she may get better yet."

He laughed softly to himself, and stood looking at her for a moment in apparently irrepressible amusement. Then he said, with aggravating gentleness,—

"It is an admirably conceived plan, Miss Holt, and I congratulate you upon its manufacture, for I am sure my poor little bride-elect would never have evolved it out of her own imagination alone; but I am neither young enough nor trusting enough to take

your story seriously. Even if it were true—"

"It is true!" broke in Judith, indignantly. He shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who indulges a child already spoilt.

"Even if it were true, Miss Holt, I could not afford to listen to your prayers. Too much is involved. If Winifred lives she must be my wife."

"And if she dies?"

"Then my luck is worse than I have believed it; but I do not believe she will die."

He spoke quite coolly, and with such utter heartlessness that Judith felt her courage fail.

Of what avail was it that she should beat her heart against a rock? Why waste her entreaties on one so absolutely deaf to pity?

Her face hardened as she observed slowly, "You are very daring, Mr. Johnson. I should have thought you had sufficient enemies without trying to make another."

"Meaning you, Miss Holt?"

"Yes, meaning me."

The cool contemptuous smile with which he regarded her stung her into saying more.

"I may prove a more formidable antagonist than you think. I know all your past life, or at least those portions of it which you would sooner keep secret; how, as Michael Straughan, you started life, and by some underhand means got the Commissioner in your power, and have been preying on him ever since, until now you have reached the farthest point that surely malignity or selfishness could reach, and have asked from him the happiness—the very life—of his daughter."

"You have never done me justice in that instance. Is it any wonder that having, as you so aptly guessed, risen from the ranks, so to speak, I should wish to marry someone in a superior position? That is only natural ambition. You cannot blame me for that?"

"Not blame you!" she cried passionately. "I more than blame you; I hate you for your cruelty, and everybody will execrate you when I make public your antecedents, and show how you have persecuted that poor child to her death."

A look came into his face that chilled her, and seemed to assure her of the fruitlessness of all such struggling, even before he spoke.

"And do you think anyone will listen to your accusations unsupported by any proof, or at best the mere testimony of a disreputable acquaintance you picked up in a bazaar?" he asked insultingly.

"Oh, I have more against you than that! For a very long time I have suspected that you are the man who ruined my father. I heard your voice once as you were leaving the house in Park-lane, and recognised it again soon after I met you here. Only this mail my father sent me the likeness of Mr. Collett, which is also a faithful portrait of yourself."

"Where is it?" quickly.

"Mr. Sherston has it at present, but I mean to ask him for it, and I will never rest till I have proved these things against you."

The angry glance she cast at him, he returned with such venom that she drew back appalled.

His wicked near-set eyes gleamed with malice, and as his thin lips curled back from his teeth she was reminded of nothing so much as a snake—a cobra—whose poisonous breath dealt instantaneous destruction.

"You will fight against me at your peril," he hissed out. "If it once comes to war between us, I will crush you without pity. I would hate you all the more because I loved you once!"

"Do you think you can frighten me like that?" she asked, scornfully. "I would do what I thought right, even if in so doing I courted the most cruel death. For Winifred's sake, I would know no fear, deal no mercy!"

"It would scarcely be the best way of proving your love for Winifred by ruining her husband!"

He spoke cautiously, as though trying to feel his way, anxious to know what he had to fear, how far her enmity would go, and what power she possessed to thwart his plans. He kept his eyes fixed on the ground as she answered,—

"You will never marry her, Mr. Johnson, never! It may be possible to save her now; but if you will not release her she will release herself! She will never live to be your wife, and if she dies I will avenge her, I swear!"

Low as were her tones they were full of concentrated passion, contempt and wrath, too deep for words to express.

It was growing dusk, but the windows of Mr. Johnson's were at the back of the house, and faced the stables, just outside which the eyes had lit a huge fire, that even from a distance threw a lurid light on the glass panes, and shed a reflected glow on Judith's pale, lovely face. She wore a red gown, fitting perfectly the exquisitely moulded figure that, held now erect, was almost grand in its tragic poise. Her small head, with its coronal of hair, quite dark in the shadow, but rich in tint where the light touched it, was thrown back proudly; her lips were parted in intense excitement, while her eyes were all on fire with scorn, and a desire to repay with interest the suffering that had been caused by him.

So might her beautiful namesake have appeared in Holofernes' tent, when, for the sake of her people she risked her honour and her life; and Johnson, looking at her furtively, realised the determined attitude she had taken, feeling half inclined to doubt his wisdom in defying her still.

The admiration which it was impossible to withhold made his voice sound less aggressive, when he replied,—

"To-morrow was to be our wedding day, and she shall marry me then, even if it is on her death bed. I cannot afford to hesitate, I have too much to lose. Nothing could turn me from my purpose, unless—"

When he paused she glanced involuntarily into his face, and saw what was in his mind. It aroused a faint hope that by trying other tactics she might succeed, and her bright blue eyes shone like stars through tears, as, leaning forward, she whispered softly,—

"For my sake, spare her. You said you cared—once."

"I care still—care a great deal too much, for my own peace of mind. Your face is before me night and day. I never forget you for a moment, never cease longing for you, loving you, worshipping you; but I know I might as well cherish a passion for the moon. It is no colder, no further out of my reach, than you!"

Though she shuddered at the unwelcome feeling his voice betrayed, hateful as it was even to listen to such words from his lips, a vague idea of gaining time, of temporising with him for Winifred's sake, prompted the reply,—

"Why should you give up hope?"

Her eyes were cast down; the red light that streamed through the windows and dyed her cheeks, might well have been mistaken for a blush, even by one not blinded by love, as was the man beside her.

"Do you mean," he questioned, hoarsely, "that if I give up Winifred I have any chance of winning you?"

"I cannot answer that. I cannot even listen to you while you are engaged to her."

She had erred in her judgment of the man with whom she had to deal. He was no love-sick boy, to be fed with promises, put off with vague hopes, but a desperate man, who had staked all on a venture, and would certainly not relinquish what he believed he had safely in his hands for a mere shadow, however seductive it might from a distance appear.

(To be continued.)

ANGELING may be said to be so like the mathematics that it is never to be fully learned.

THEY ARE NOT DEAD!

—:—:—

Oh! do not think we are parted
Because ye see her face no more;
There is no death for the true-hearted,
The loved, who hasten on before;
Who open doors for us, and brighten
The way o' the cross that we must tread,
And, smoothing the rough places, lighten
The load we bear: they are not dead!

We know not what diviner mission
Is theirs, who pass from sense and breath
Set free in that sublime transition
To boundless life—that we call death!
Tho' the eternal gates be hidden
That shut them from our mortal sight,
Unrecognised, and oft unbidden,
They yet are with us day and night.

They move us thro' our finer senses,
They play upon the deeper chords
Of life, these loving influences,
The songs we never set to words;
But in our conscious hearts there lingers
The meaning of that loftier strain,
That, awakened by invisible fingers,
Stirs us to nobler joy—or pain.

Beset by ills that daze and wound us,
Cowed by the dread of evil things,
How oft we feel them weaving round us
A parody of strong white wings!
That blunts the shafts of pain and sorrow,
And lift us from the storm and night
To heights of an unclouded morrow—
The threshold of eternal light.

Our loving thoughts of the departed,
We call them memories of the dead;
There is no death for the true-hearted—
Theirs is the perfect life instead.
Beyond the veil that dills our vision
They have their fair abiding place,
Where, mid unclouded joys elysian
We know they see our Father's face.

L. A.

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

—:—:—

CHAPTER VIII.

It is not given to everyone to make a fortune quickly; but yet, as Shakespeare tells us, "there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;" and when Henry Bradley, a poverty-stricken man, disappointed by his aunt's cutting off his allowance and refusing all help, set out for Africa, there is no doubt he was taking the tide of his affairs at the flood.

He was a brave, handsome young fellow, and his youth had been one dream of happiness. A large and liberal allowance from his aunt, the best of educations, and a pleasant home in a country Rectory, with the certainty that, just as soon as he could take orders, an excellent family living would be ready for him! Yes, it was a fair prospect, only poor Hal marred it all by falling desperately in love with the only daughter of the country Rector, and refusing, on conscientious scruples, to become a clergyman.

There was a fearful commotion. He was threatened with disinheritance, but disbelieving the threats he defied them, and married Miss Katy on a small clerkship, trusting that time would soften his aunt's heart.

Alack-a-day! time only hardened it. While the Rector lived there was no prick of poverty in the young ménage, but when his first grandchild was in long clothes he died, and then the imprudent young couple found out their true position. Ninety pounds a year to support themselves and a little child! Why Hal had been used to double as much for pocket-money, and Katy all her life had been ambitious.

Ambitious! Ay, she never loved her husband as he did her. She was as fond of him as it was her nature to be of anyone, but it was a very different fondness from that he bore for her. She did not scruple to reproach him for his poverty, to remind him of the sacrifice she had made. Poor Hal! he loved his beautiful wife as his own life, loved her as it comes to but few women to be loved; but his spirit sank beneath the constant burden of her repining, and when he was offered a post in South Africa he never thought of refusing it.

"I shall be able to send home money to you, my darling!" he said, hopefully; "and when I have made a pretty easy home out there, I shall come back and fetch my wife and child."

The appointment was for three years, at the end of that time Mr. Bradley would have six months' leave of absence, and if he chose to return to Africa a far larger income.

It would have been madness to refuse such a chance. What was a three years' parting when they had their lives to spend together? So the two said "Good-bye" in high spirits, and Kathleen Bradley went with her little girl to live in the house of her kind old nurse.

"Johnson will take care of baby," said Mrs. Bradley, who was not a very devoted mother; "and it will be much cheaper than our staying on here."

"We have been very happy here," said Hal, with a strange kind of lump in his throat. "Wife, when I come back I should like us to have this very house, only all of it, not just two rooms."

He went to his appointment full of hope, and it seemed as if all prospered with him. Whatever he touched succeeded. He rose higher and higher in the confidence of his employers, and though so prudent to become a thorough-going speculator, he could not help dabbling a little in the shares which were then the mania of South Africa, and whatever he bought turned, as though by magic, into gold.

It was that time—only a few years ago—when everything and everyone in South Africa had the speculation mania keenly, when bank clerks made a hundred pounds privately in half-an-hour, when fine ladies had their "name" on paper representing thousands. It was a wild, exciting time, but it held only success for Hal Bradley. His fortune grew apace. Month after month he transmitted money to England for safe investment. Month after month it became more certain that at the end of three years he would return to England able to live in ease for the rest of his days.

He sent Kathleen ten pounds a month, the sum they had agreed upon, but he never mentioned his increase of salary, his large gains from other sources. He wanted to surprise her; besides, he knew his wife.

Katy would not have endured the idea of economy; she would have spent so freely in the present as to do away with all chance of his being able to save enough to live on in the future.

He loved his wife with a boundless love, and if he kept his secret he kept it in all love. He was a handsome man; his university training and high birth had given him a noble bearing and comely manners. He was a general favourite in Port Elizabeth. He accepted the kindness and hospitality shown him gratefully, but all the while his life seemed incomplete. To him, happiness meant Kathleen. He could not rejoice away from her, and yet he bore his exile bravely, cheerfully, and patiently for her sake.

Only he looked forward to the end of the three years' separation with eagerness—yearned for it even as a captive does for freedom. Some men's hearts can hold many loves, many interests; Hal's had room but for one passion—his devotion to his wife.

It came at last, the moment he had so longed for—the November day which was to see his departure from Port Elizabeth.

He was not easy about his wife; Kathleen was a notoriously bad correspondent. Many of his letters she left unanswered. When she did write she varied between a petulant carelessness, which would not answer his eager questions, and an almost morbid tone of reproach, which made him more anxious than ever to be at her side—her protector and comforter.

The last letter specially was of this nature. It was longer far than Kathleen generally wrote, and it was chiefly about their little daughter.

"They say she is like me," wrote Hal's beautiful young wife; "and yet it seems to me—poor baby!—she had better be like anyone else in the world rather than her mother. But Blanche is sweet and loving; she will comfort you, Hal, with her baby fingers; she will soothe the grief my loss will have caused. I am not ill; I feel no pain, only there is an awful presentiment on me. I shall never rest in your arms again, never, never again!

"I have not been a good wife, Hal; not as people in books and admirable matrons count goodness; but I loved you, dear, after my own fashion as much as I was capable of. It was my beauty won you, Hal; if my child has that beauty love her for my sake, and forget my faults and failings, dear. Sometimes I wish you'd never left me. I'm weak and weary, Hal; only you love me, so think kindly of me through it all."

It was a sad letter. Hal Bradley's eyes were moist as he read it. Of course she was dull and unhappy, poor darling, in that dreary suburban house, with a little child for her sole companion; but he was going back to her, to kiss away her tears, to make her life one dream of happiness. She might be sad now, but she would smile again. All her pretty fascinations would return when she found refuge once more in her husband's arms.

So, after all, the letter could not wholly damp his spirits.

It was a heavenly day when he left Port Elizabeth, a day perhaps such as one sees only in Africa. The sky was a pure azure blue, the wind blew gently. Summer had hardly begun, and so the earth was green still, and lacked the brown, parched look it bears in the long droughts.

Hal, as he stood on the jetty looking at the fine steamer that was to bear him homeward, thought Africa had never seemed so fair to him.

"It's not a bad place after all," he said, lightly, to a comrade who had come to see him off; "only one gets tired of it."

"Or tired of wanting those who are not here?" asked his comrade. "I don't believe half the people who rail against Port Elizabeth dislike the place itself; it is the want of those they have left behind them, the yearning for friendly faces and dear familiar spots that troubles them."

"Perhaps."

"You go home rejoicing," returned the other, a thorough colonist; "but you will miss something in England. Where will you find a sky like ours?"

Hal laughed.

"I will take my chance of that," and he sprang lightly on board the steam launch waiting to take passengers to the *Trojan*.

I trow of all her passengers not one had brighter expectations than poor Hal. Not one would be so grievously disappointed!

It was an unpleasant voyage. They had left Africa in the beauty of early summer; they reached Southampton in the worst pangs of winter.

But I doubt if Hal minded; he was too full of his wife and child to mind the state of the atmosphere.

He was returning a full month before Kathleen expected him.

The thought came to him, how delightful it would be to see if the house where they had spent their early married life were still to let,

and, if so, secure it for their new home. It might delay their reunion a few hours, but what would that be compared to the joyous news he would be able to carry with him?

So when he reached London his first point was that quiet suburban road where he had taken Kathleen a bride.

He stood before the house, leaning against the railings and looking up to the unshuttered window; but there was no notice that the house was to let. No other could have the same attraction to him; those windows recalled all his married life. There was the parlour where Katy used to sit with her work, watching for his coming. In that large front room above his firstborn child had first seen the light: dear little Blanche, he had left her a helpless baby, she must be a smiling damsel of four years old now.

He fell to thinking dreamily of the child as the sunshine of his home, the little elder daughter, when new babies filled her mother's arms.

He turned away with a smile on his lip. No human mind could have been more hopeful for the future than his was then.

It was getting dark. On the first of December the days are very short. Hal pictured his meeting with his darling in the firelight they both had used to love so well; he felt as if happiness were strangely near him as he hailed a cab and gave the address:

"Drogheda Villa, Hamwynd-road."

It seemed to him the longest drive he had ever taken; he would fain have lent the wings of his own impatience to the flagging horse. He did enjoin quickness again and again on the driver, with such success that the cab reached Camberwell a good ten minutes sooner than any ordinary vehicle would have performed the distance.

Hal tossed the man half-a-sovereign, unlatched the gate and walked up the little path, his heart beating wildly.

A knock, and then a long space of waiting. Another knock louder than the first, and the door flew open. Mrs. Johnson's well-remembered face was before him.

But never, never in the days of his boyhood, when he and Katy had played tricks on her, had the good woman looked terrified as she did now; her face was white as death, and she shook like an aspen leaf.

"There's nothing the matter?" cried poor Bradley, sorely troubled at her manner. "Why, nurse, don't you know me?"

Mrs. Johnson threw up her hands.

"Oh, good Mr. Ghost, have pity on a poor, lone widow, that never did anyone any harm!"

"Susan!" agitated.

She executed a kind of terrified war-dance, backing determinedly from his outstretched hand.

"Susan, don't you know me?"

"Oh, go away!" moaned the poor woman.

"Susan, I'm Hal Bradley, and I have come to claim my wife and child! Dear old nurse, don't you know me?"

"It's like his voice," ruminated the old woman.

"It's himself, Susan. How am I to convince you? You can't have forgotten me?"

"You're dead!" cried Mrs. Johnson, fairly distraught. "At least, I mean Mr. Hal's dead. Who you can be I can't imagine, unless you're his ghost!"

"There is some awful mistake, nurse! I am Hal Bradley, and I never have been dead. I never ailed anything since I left England!"

Mrs. Johnson looked as though she longed to believe him.

Hal pushed up his shirt-sleeve and exhibited a strange device tattooed on his arm in blue ink.

"Don't you remember, nurse, when we were children, Katy and I took it into our heads to cut our initials on our arms in case the gipsies stole us? I had done mine, and was just going to do Katy's when Mr. Bradley found it out and put a stop to it."

There were the marks; there was the well-remembered voice. Mrs. Johnson had one

great struggle with her fears and capitulated. "I do believe it's Master Hal!"

"It is, indeed."

"Then why did you send word you were dead, and break your wife's heart?"

They were in the little parlour now, which was bright with lamplight. Mr. Bradley turned to the old woman impulsively.

"I never sent word I was dead."

"But she had the letter."

"Who?"

"Miss Katy."

"This is awful!" and poor Hal wiped the heavy beads of perspiration from his brow.

"Do you mean to tell me my wife, Kathleen, believes that I am dead?"

"Just that, sir."

"But—"

"She came here, the poor darling," interrupted Mrs. Johnson, "and she said she'd got a letter. You was dead, and she and the child were alone in the world."

"There must have been treachery at work, but I can't make it out."

"And you have not been ill, sir?"

"Never once."

"She believed the letter as if it was gospel. She sat down here, sir, and cried as if her heart was just clean broken."

"I will avenge the cruel jest bitterly!" cried Hal. "It seems an unpardonable act of cruelty!"

"I'm sure you might have knocked me down with a feather, sir, when I saw you. I could think nothing but it was your ghost."

"And my wife, Katy?"

It was the very day Mrs. Johnson had returned from her fruitless quest. Evidently Mr. Bradley expected to find his wife well and at Drogheda Villa. How could she tell him beautiful Kathleen was dead, and she did not even know where they had lain her?

The poor old nurse had served her children very faithfully, and yet now she felt guilty as she stood before Hal, and he asked her for his wife.

"She is living here with you?" said Mr. Bradley. "Has this sad news made any difference?"

"She never lived with me, sir. She stayed barely a month, then she said she must try and make a little money. She left little Miss Blanche with me, and went away."

"You mean she has not been here since?"

"Oh, yes, Master Hal! She came regular every month, and other times, too, only she never lived here."

"Then where did she live?"

He felt angry. Nothing provokes a man more than finding out accidentally he has been deceived.

"She lived away at the West-end somewhere, sir, with a friend she had—a Miss Lestrange."

"Miss Lestrange!"

"I never saw her, sir."

"I never even heard of her!"

"She is an actress, Master Hal. I think, maybe, she got Miss Katy some little part on the stage; anyway, she loved her dearly!"

"And my wife is with Miss Lestrange?"

"No, sir."

"Where then?"

"I don't know."

Hal looked angry.

"When did you see her last?"

"I can't quite tell you, sir. Maybe it was a fortnight ago. She came soon after she brought me the news of your death to fetch away her little girl."

"Blanche gone too?"

"Miss Katy told me then, sir, she was very ill. She said she was certain she should not be long after you. She couldn't bear the thought of her little one being alone in the world, and so she meant to send her to be nursed for your sake. She felt sure Miss Morton would give her a home."

"Go on!"

"Well, Master Hal, I felt uneasy. I'd known Miss Katy always, and I'd never heard her speak like that. I hadn't her address, or

I should have gone myself to see how she was when the days passed, and her promised letter did not come."

"And have you heard nothing since?"

"The letter came last Monday, a week ago to-day. As I'd heard nothing, I took courage, and sent a line to Miss Lestrange, begging her to send me Mrs. Bradley's address. It was easy enough to get her address, for, you see, she's a celebrity, sir."

"And she answered you?"

"She wrote by return of post. You shall see the letter, Master Hal."

"Only tell me what she said."

"She said Mrs. Bradley died in her arms the day after I saw her. Oh! Master Hal, it almost broke my heart! Miss Lestrange wrote a beautiful letter. She said all had been done as though she was her sister; and she had put away her little possessions all ready for me; I could have them any time I liked to call."

"She must have been a good woman!" said Hal.

"Ay! And I meant to go and see her, and hear all about my poor dear, but the news upset me so I couldn't make the effort. I let the days slip on, and it was only this afternoon I dressed myself and went."

"And you saw her?"

"It was too late; she had gone abroad. The servant seemed to know I might be coming, and said the things had been sent by Parcel Post. Sure enough, I found them there when I got home."

Mr. Bradley rose, and then sank back in his chair. He was a strong man, but this awful news had robbed him of all power of action.

"It is awful! I can't believe it!"

"I can!" said the woman, sadly. "The last time I ever saw Miss Katy there was a look in her eyes that spoke of trouble. I seemed to feel there was sorrow coming, but I never thought of this!"

"Dead!" cried poor Hal in his anguish. "Dead! and she will never know how I worked for her, how I toiled to make an easeful home for her and the little one!"

"She knows, maybe, now," said the old woman, reverently. "Anyway, she's taken from the evil to come, Master Hal; you should be glad of that!"

But Hal was past being glad, past everything but sorrow! Even the thought of his little daughter could not comfort him for her mother's loss.

"That she should have died while I was on my way to her! That she should have died alone, with no one who loved her to smooth her pillow! Oh! it is too terrible!"

"Think of the little one!" pleaded the old servant. "You've her to comfort you!"

He tried to think of her, but her mother's eyes rose up before him. He had worshipped Kathleen from his boyhood upwards. Not even her own child could drive her from his heart!

"I must see Miss Lestrange!"

"But she's abroad, sir!"

He smiled sadly.

"I can go after her. I am a rich man now, nurse; money is no object to me!"

"But you'll stay here to-night?" urged Nurse. "Oh! Master Hal, don't spend your first night in England away from all who know you."

He yielded. He slept that night at Drogheda Villa; and even flattered Mrs. Johnson by promising to make it his head-quarters while in London; but when he came down to breakfast the next morning the faithful old servant uttered a cry of mingled sorrow and surprise.

"Oh, Master Hal!"

Well might she exclaim! The twelve hours of grief had changed him sadly from the bright, confident traveller who reached Drogheda Villa so full of hope. His eyes were hollow, his face lined with trouble, and some silver threads showed in his dark hair. One night of anguish had changed him more than three years' toil beneath a tropical sun. He

had been a very youthful-looking man before; now he seemed years older than his age.

"And what shall you do to-day, sir?" Miss Blanche will be your first thought."

He shook his head.

"I must find Miss Lestrange."

Mrs. Johnson sighed.

"I shall have no peace until I find her," went on Hal. "I want to hear from her own lips my darling's last words. I want to know all she can tell me about my Katy's death. If I spend my whole fortune, and years of my life in the attempt, I must find Miss Lestrange!"

"You'd best go to the theatre! I'm thinking then, Mr. Hal, Miss Lestrange wasn't like so many actresses, always moving about. She never acted except at the New Theatre. Miss Katy used to promise to take me to see her, but she never had the time, poor darling!"

The suggestion seemed the simplest and best plan. Mr. Bradley caught at it. It was, at any rate, something to be done, and he was in that mood when anything is preferable to waiting. He knew very little of things theatrical, only the first step in seeking Miss Lestrange seemed to be to speak to her employer.

At about eleven he hailed a cab and drove off to the New Theatre. At first he was steadily refused admittance; the porter protested Mr. Gordon saw no one without an appointment. At last he bethought himself of sending in his card with one hasty line scrawled upon it.

"My business is unprofessional, and strictly personal. I only want to ask you a simple question, and will not detain you an instant after you have answered it."

Perhaps the appeal touched the manager's heart, perhaps he only denied himself to strangers because he was besieged by amateurs who wished to change themselves into professional and salaried actors. He rose to receive Hal with all courtesy—a tall, earnest-looking man, with intellect stamped upon his clearly-cut features.

"Have you forgotten me, Bradley?"

Hal stared, then remembered the eloquent master of the school where he had spent two years before going to Oxford.

"I knew your name at once," said the manager, kindly. "I have given up teaching; an old uncle left me a small fortune, just enough to launch me in the profession. I have succeeded beyond my hopes, and the time of small means and refractory pupils seems very far behind. But you were never refractory, Bradley. I don't know anyone whom it could have given me greater pleasure to meet. Now, what can I do for you? Miss Morton's heir can't have a fancy for the stage!"

"I am not Miss Morton's heir," said Hal, quickly. "I have been three years in Africa, making my fortune. I only returned to London last night."

"And is it made?"

"Ay." Then he broke down, to the other's dismay; his head fell on his breast, hoarse sobs choked him.

"My dear fellow, speak. How can I help you? Drink this! It will revive you."

Hal swallowed his wine, composed himself, and went on—

"I came back a rich man to rejoin my wife and child. Mr. Gordon, on the threshold of the house I had a difficulty; the old servant declared I was a ghost. It was a dreary welcome, but more was to come. I had no sooner overcome her fears than she told me of my wife's death, when I was actually on my way to rejoin her! The woman I had loved more than life had breathed her last."

Mr. Gordon wrung his hand in silent sympathy.

"I must hurry on," said the younger man, "I am trespassing on your time."

"My time is yours this morning. I only wish I could help you. Young, just setting out in life, it is an awful blow!"

"Ay, there is but one consolation left me, and you can give it me!"

The manager threw up his hands.

"I can't guess how I can help you; but rely upon my will."

"My wife had but one friend. She died, apart from all who knew and loved her, wrapped in that friend's arms. Mr. Gordon, all my life long I must owe a debt of gratitude to that woman; but, apart from that it would comfort me to hear from her own lips my Kathleen's last words?"

"Of course; and you think I can find her? She must be a rare creature."

"An angel of compassion. She is in your company. I want you to give me her address."

The manager stared.

"I don't know a woman in my company who can be your poor wife's friend. I have some of the prettiest girls in London, but I don't think one of them would care to be at a deathbed."

"I am sure she is in your company."

"Her name?"

"Rosamond Lestrange!"

The pencil with which the manager was playing escaped his fingers and fell to the ground.

"Miss Lestrange!"

"You will not mock me. You will have pity and tell me where she is?"

"I will tell you where she was only last Saturday. Miss Lestrange left my company then."

Hal stared in blank dismay.

"I have sent there. They said she had gone abroad."

"I expected so."

"But you must know where she is?"

"If she intended to return to the stage she would have given me her address; but she is very beautiful, and, reports says, has sacrificed celebrity to love. Rosamond Lestrange had more lovers than I could tell you. I am certain she left the New Theatre to be married, but to whom I cannot say."

"And I cannot find her?"

"She is too beautiful to be hid long. She is the loveliest woman I ever saw, and till I heard your story I should have said the most heartless."

"Oh, no!"

"She seemed so—anyone here would tell you the same thing. To our eyes her thoughts began and ended with herself. I am glad to find we are mistaken."

"She has been as a sister to my wife."

"Really?"

"Ay, in sickness and health!"

"Perhaps I am prejudiced; I never liked her."

"Why not?"

"There was a mystery about her. She came to me without introduction. How she got in I don't know, but I found her in this room, and she pleaded for an engagement. She was so lovely I knew it would pay me to engage her, if she never had the brains to learn a part. She came and took us by storm; in three months she was my leading lady."

"But what is there in all that for you to dislike her?"

"I hate mystery."

"I see none."

"She was here more than two years. In all that time she never once alluded to her past life; she never made a friend among all the company. I don't believe she ever addressed a word to them not strictly necessary. It was not that she despised them; simply she had nothing to gain from them, so she left them alone."

"She may have been shy."

"Shy! She broke men's hearts as cleverly as any woman I ever saw! Shy! I tell you she had not sufficient feeling. She never seemed to have any feeling—off the stage."

"Were you not on good terms with her?"

"I never had to reprove her once. She kept the terms of her agreement to the letter; she was very easy to get on with. Some actresses are full of fancies—Miss Lestrange had abso-



[WAS HE IN TIME?]

Intely none. The first day she came she made one eccentric proviso, but beyond that she was quite free from crotchets."

"And that?"

"That she should never be photographed! She told me she could not bear the idea of her likeness being sold in shops. I was annoyed at first, but I gave in."

"And you cannot help me?"

"I wish I could; but, Bradley, you are sure to find her sooner or later. A woman with such a face could not be long 'hidden.'"

"And her husband—he would not wish to keep her away from her native land?"

"If my suspicions are correct, she has married into the upper ten thousand. If so, her name will soon be in the Peerage. Have no fears, Hal, we shall find her, though I confess it would not give me much comfort to talk of anyone I loved to Rosamond Lestrangle."

There was nothing for it but to go. Evidently the manager could tell him nothing more.

It seemed strange to him, as he walked away, that everyone to whom he spoke of her should unite in thinking ill of Kathleen's friend. He drew a fancy portrait of Miss Lestrangle as he walked along. He pictured her as a shy, reserved girl—proud, perhaps—and to strangers cold, but still with a tender, loving heart.

How far he was from guessing her true nature! How far from thinking that though she had wronged many men and spoiled their lives she had never wringed one so entirely, so bitterly as himself!

He did not hurry to go down to Keston. He loved his little daughter, but even her baby-fingers could not comfort him for her mother's loss.

He wrote to Miss Morton announcing his return to England, and his willingness to relieve her of the care of Blanche; but Aunt Frances wrote back promptly that whatever happened, whether he went back to Africa or stayed in England, he must leave her

Blanche. She could not spare the little creature who had crept into her heart of hearts.

For the rest it was a kind letter. Evidently the spinster was willing to let bygones be bygones. Now poor Kathleen was dead—evidently, too, now that he no longer needed help—he was to look on himself once more as his aunt's heir. It was the way of the world.

He shrank from the meeting even while he longed for it; and so he lingered in London, avowedly to settle his affairs, really because he could not bring himself to look into his little girl's face, and tell her she was motherless.

His affairs needed little supervision. He was possessed of property bringing in about eight hundred a year. On this he could live suitably in ease and comfort, and bring up Blanche as became an English gentlewoman. There would be no more children to provide for; as long as Hal lived he would never bring himself to put another woman in his wife's place.

He thought his lot hard, he complained in his own heart bitterly. It seemed to him as if no sorrow could be like to his.

But he was to find griefs as cruel.

When he had been in London about a fortnight, one day, when he was standing in a chemist's shop, he saw a young girl come in and ask for a packet of poison for rats. She put down the threepence and was passing out, when something in her face filled him with a nameless fear. Almost in spite of himself he was impelled to follow her.

She was quite young almost a child. He tried to persuade himself the awful dread upon him was causeless, absurd, only it was there.

She left the chemist's and turned into Oxford-street; he followed. It was a bitter December day; the wind blew and the sleet fell in almost blinding force; still the girl went on as one who knows no fatigue, and still that awful fear compelled Hal to follow.

She stopped at last at a stationer's—a superior, thoroughly respectable shop, whose appearance well-nigh allayed his fears. He stood outside watching her. No word of the discourse was lost to him, and as he watched he saw in the window a neat card, announcing that lessons in French and music were given by a young lady, for whose terms and address the reader was invited to apply within.

"No," the master of the shop told the girl, speaking more kindly than strangers often trouble to do to the poor. "No, no one has inquired. You see it is too near the holidays. People don't want to see about lessons with Christmas coming on. A month hence there will be more chance."

She thanked him, and went out. It seemed to Hal she pressed the parcel she had received from the chemist a little closer. Her face was very pale, her lips were closely set; still she went on—and still he followed.

A dull, narrow lodging, off one of the streets in Tottenham Court-road, she went in; he hesitated. Had he grounds to invade the privacy of her home? He waited till she had climbed the dark staircase; then he rang the bell.

The woman of the house appeared.

"I have called about some lessons," he said, shortly. "They sent me here from a shop in Holborn, but could you tell me the lady's name?"

"You must mean Miss Earl," she said, curtly. "Will you go up, sir? It's the front room; she has just come in."

He went up. It seemed to him he forgot his own sorrows then, forgot Kathleen, for the poor young creature he had tracked from the chemist's shop stood with a tumbler in her hand. No need to doubt what it contained; the wrapper of the vermin poison lay on the floor empty. The one question was, had she already drunk the fearful draught, or—was he in time?

(To be continued.)



"SHALL I SEE?" JACK ASKED, FAINTLY. "OH! SIS, IT HASN'T BEEN ALL IN VAIN, HAS IT?"

NOVELETTE—continued.]

SUNBEAM.

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CHAPTER III.—(continued.)

WEARY and sick with some horrible indefinite dread that seemed to overpower her, Rennie entered the drawing-room to meet Winter, who, though old, and not very quick-sighted, yet saw there was something amiss with her young mistress.

"Why, you've been crying, dearie!" she said, anxiously. "Who's been a fretting of yer? Lord help them if I catches any jade or clown bringing tears into those blue eyes!"

"Grandpa says I have taken cold, Winter, and that you are to make me some of your nice herb tea."

"Rabbish, you ain't got no cold, dearie; it's crying you've been! Come, Dovekins," gathering the girl in her ample bosom; "old Winter knows how to comfort yer," and down she plumped on one of the peach-plush couches with her charge, who wept softly, while the dame crooned and whispered words of love and comfort to the overcharged heart.

"Do you believe in presentiments, Winter, dear?" she asked, when she grew calmer. "A kind of awful foreshadowing of some unknown evil, like the sensation you say is a sign of somebody walking over your grave—only worse?"

"Lawks a mercy, no! I don't believe in any such uncanny stuff!"

"I wish I didn't; but I can't help it! You know I had just such a feeling when dear Jack had that dreadful blight, and I entreated him not to go on the river, and he would. All I was afraid of was that we should have a spill. I never dreamt anything could happen like it did; but what

would we not all give now if he had listened to my pleadings; he might still have his sight."

"That is only known to the Blessed Ruler of all," Winter rejoined solemnly. "We poor creatures are but babies in knowledge. Not as you ain't a very clever, Dovekins!" this tenderly, and the Dovekins smiled through her tears, while her eyes were being dabbed in the same old way she remembered so well when she a small child had been especially naughty, and was being comforted by as faithful a friend as ever blessed the heart of mortal.

Very soon they were both deeply immersed in a drawing of herbs, and a pungent odour steamed out of a pipkin, which they both stirred in turns, the old lady deeming it advisable to have her child near her so as to quell any more feverishness or weeping. Of course, putting it all down to hysteria.

So they were both found by Jack, who had been prowling all over the mansion with his stick.

"What a jolly smell!" he exclaimed, dropping on a chair they hastened to place for him. "The house is as lonely as a tomb! Why are you not playing, sis?"

"I've had a fit of the grumps," laughed Rennie, "and Winter is nursing me up; but we shan't be very long complaining of quiet now that uncle and cousin are coming to live here!"

"I only hope he'll be kind to you, two," grunted Winter. "He never was a very nice master when he was young. Even the dogs used to slink away from the sound of his voice!"

"Why?" Rennie asked.

"Because he was over fond of using his cane or whip, anything that came in handy."

"Then he was cruel?" Jack put in.

"Cruel was too soft a word; brutal is more the likes of it, Master Jack. Why, I can recall the day, as if it were only yesterday, when he caught your dear mamma's favourite cat,

because she had offended him, and threw it down the well and pelted it with stones as it tried to climb some of the jagged bricks!"

"What did you do?" cried Rennie, her eyes blazing, her nostrils dilated, her breath coming in little pants.

"I called him a brute, and he sniggered at me, and said he'd serve me the same if I called him names."

"And did you let the poor cat die?" gasped Rennie, indignantly.

"Not I. I ain't made of such stuff as that. No, I tore like the wind to Sir Capel, and got assistance, and gave him a lecture he didn't forget; but he owed me a grudge from that moment, but I didn't care a brass farthing for his frowns and bluster."

"I shall hate him!" ejaculated Jack, earnestly.

"You mustn't take to do that, Master Jack. Maybe he's grown wiser now he's older," chided Winter, regretting she had used her tongue so freely.

"I couldn't like him if he was as old as Methuselah!" cried Rennie. "What is age to do with it? A wicked old man or woman who ceases to sin because of old age is a mean, pitiable object, whose weakness alone deters them from further iniquity!"

"Lawks, Dovekins, you talks like a parson! If your mamma could only see and hear you now she'd go crazed with pride and joy!"

"Give us 'Home, Sweet Home!' sis, for it seems to me it won't long be that to you and I!" pleaded Jack, a short time after the confab in Nurse Winter's snug room.

They had "Home, Sweet Home!" and no end of other old favourites; then they sat down by a newly-made fire ordered by the thoughtful little *châtelaine*, thinking it would please grandpa; then she read out "Ten Thousand a Year," and they both roared with laughter at the vagaries of "Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse," at the green mop of hair, the dyeing process resulted in, till Rennie looked at the clock,

and jumped up, letting fall her calf-bound book with a thud, exclaiming in affright,—

"Why, I declare, it is past seven o'clock, and grandpa is never later than six!"

"It is rather odd," responded her brother in evident concern, which he tried to conceal. "Shall we go down to the Lodge? You might catch sight of them, for Mr. Denton is coming to dine with us, and perhaps some other gentlemen?"

"Oh! yes, by all means, Jack!" she said, tremulously.

Away they hastened, his hand linked in her arm, to the gate, almost breathless with their haste.

"Do you see any sign of them?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, not a vestige. It's just like the story of Blue Beard; there isn't anything in sight, not even a flock of sheep."

"Oh, they will come up presently with a wet sail, as Saunders used to say," he returned, cheerily. "Have you got your wrap well round your chest? It's a nasty, cold wind."

"Yes, Jack, I'm muffled up to my chin," she said, climbing up to the second rail of the gate, to get a better view of the road, and thinking what a thoughtful, loving soul her brother Jack was.

There was silence for some time, only broken by the rustle of the trees and the twittering of the birds; then she discerned several people turning the bend of the road, but there was no sound of talking; they seemed mute, and the upright, graceful figure of her grandfather was not among the gentlemen on horseback.

"Jack!" she gasped, incoherently. "grandpa is not with the party. Oh! Jack! Jack! something is wrong; they are carrying a hurdle! I can see it! I can see it!"

"No, no, Rennie! don't break a fellow's heart!" he answered, hoarsely. "I am blind! blind! Is that not enough?" and helpless, sightless, his heart wrrenched with a fearful dread, he sank down on the stone that stayed the gate from banging off its hinges, prostrated at the awful thought that began to take possession of him.

Mr. Denton, seeing the little white figure, rode up hastily before the others, with that nameless something they bore in silence, could reach her.

"Miss Allison, dear child, as a very dear friend of yours and your family, permit me to conduct both yourself and brother to the house?"

"I know what it is you are bringing!" she said, in a choking voice. "It is grandpa! He is dead! I am no child!"

Then, turning to Jack, who seemed dazed, she led him into the mansion, and said, in a far-away voice, and glassy eyes that seemed riveted on space,—

"Stand here, Jack; we have to meet grandpa, if not in life in death, at the threshold of his own roof."

Mechanically the poor lad obeyed, and the men bore the hurdle in, and beneath a lavender-scented sheet hastily put on by one of the farmer's wives, lay all that was once mortal of one of the truest and best of men and gentlemen.

The servants all stole on tiptoe with faces delayed in tears—real genuine tears—at the loss of a kind, just master.

Not a tear did Rennie shed before them, they seemed to have fled; but with stately tread she led the way to the drawing-room, motioned the bearers to leave their burthen in the centre of the room, then followed them out and shut the door.

Was the fountain dried up now that she was alone with her precious dead? No, thank Heaven, no!

She flung aside the sheet and knelt down, taking the cold, slim hand in hers, and bedewed it with tears and kisses, and gazed into the noble face, the majesty of death illuminating the clear cut features, she sobbed,—

"Darling grandpa! dear loving heart!

your guardian angel warned me of this. Why did you not listen to my pleadings? Yet why should I begrudge you to Him who has called you? Perhaps mother wanted you, and asked God to summon you!"

And thus she babbled on incoherently until her faithful nurse found her and led her away.

The day and accident cast a gloom throughout the whole county, where he was universally loved and respected.

It seemed that in leaping over some broken high gun—a new one and fully cocked—became entangled, and in extricating it, it went off and shot him dead on the spot, a catastrophe no one could have averted.

The days that followed were passed by Rennie in mourning all the holiness of their choicest blossoms which she weaved into chaplets and garlands to lay at the feet of her beloved dead.

In this long task her heart's bitter anguish found peace from its torrid grief, and hand in hand with Jack the domestic world met them either going or coming from the room they had craved into a shrine.

The day of the funeral, to their further dismay, Miss Eleanor Lyth was taken dangerously ill, brought on, the doctor affirmed, by the shock of her father's sudden death.

Muffled footsteps and subdued whispers still reigned in the house of mourning, notwithstanding the blinds were once again raised to admit the light and sunshine.

Rennie, feeling terribly disconsolate and wretched, implored her aunt to permit her to stay and nurse her, but was repulsed so harshly that the poor child burst into tears and fled out to seek Winter to take her place beside the querulous sufferer.

When the mourners returned the family lawyer, in the presence of Mr. Denton, sealed all the boxes and drawers of the late Baronet's until the arrival of the new one.

"This is where Sir Capel kept his will," the lawyer observed, as he sealed up with especial care an old ebony and silver escutcheon that stood beside his bed. "Safe bind safe find is the motto of we men of the law."

"Quite right, sir," returned Mr. Denton, as they left the room, and joined the group of gentlemen in the library, who had come to pay their last respects to their old friend.

Rennie sat and watched them as they one and all departed with downcast faces, some on foot, some in their carriages; the heavy black crapes robes seemed to pin her down to her chair, to hamper her weary limbs, while her sunny eyes were dim and hollow for want of sleep; and when her heavy head touched the pillow that night she felt that sweet, refreshing sleep would be a boon indeed, but one that she was not doomed to enjoy for long; and scarcely had she passed into dream-land when Winter stood, candle in hand, her face laden with alarming tidings, saying,—

"Wake up, dearie, your poor aunt is taken worse, and is calling for you."

"Is she dying?" Rennie cried, in distress.

"I cannot say. I only know she is mortal bad, dearie."

Rennie thrust her feet into her slippers and aided Winter in putting on her dressing-gown and faltered, as she sped up to the sick room,—

"Oh! perhaps it is not so bad; she may get well yet."

"Be prepared for the worst," she interposed, soothingly. "Doctor Wynne is with her. I sent for him the moment I saw the change, and he bade me fetch you."

Dr. Wynne went forward and took the little hands in his and led her to the bed where lay the dying woman, for there was no mistaking that grey shadow which hovered like a hazy veil over the wan, troubled face.

"Stoop down, child, and tell her you are here," he enjoined. "She is troubled; there is something on her mind."

"Auntie, dear, Rennie has come to sit by you to pray with you, if you will let her," she said, tenderly.

Only an incoherent sound came from the poor quivering lips and a feeble gesture towards the dressing-table.

"What can she want?" Rennie asked, in dismay, not seeing anything there she could possibly be pointing to.

The doctor went over to it and touched the bottles and jars, then he touched a jewel-case, and the sufferer tried to articulate something and made him understand to bring it to her.

They opened it and placed it down where her hands could touch its contents—poor little hands whose restlessness had fled for ever. They closed over a very old-fashioned bracelet, whose medallion was a large heart of pearls; this she placed in Rennie's hand and tried her hardest to say something as she pointed to it.

"I see what she means," Rennie said, tearfully, looking at the inscription on the inside of it. "This was my poor dead mother's. See, it says, 'Elate Lyth, on her eighteenth birthday, from her affectionate father, Capel Lyth, she wishes to restore it to me,' and she changed it round her wrist and laid it caressingly on the withered hand of her aunt."

Yet it seemed to afford her no peace or comfort, and she made several vain attempts to speak, but only a guttural sound issued from the clammy lips. After a while the fast-glazing eyes closed, and she fell into an unconscious state.

Before the flowers woke up from their slumbers and the sun bathed the earth in its hazy pink glory, the spirit of Eleanor Lyth was set free to meet at the crystal river the loved ones gone before.

The poor heavily-burdened heart was released at last from its earthly cares and bitter disappointments which had wrecked and ruined her life.

About a fortnight after the second funeral Sir William Lyth and his daughter arrived, and the will of course was ordered to be read.

Rennie, with almost a scared face and manner foreign to her frank, fearless nature, went forth to receive the travellers.

Jack stood in the rear trying to catch the sound of his uncle's voice, a habit he had contracted since his loss of sight; he could tell an enemy from a friend by that test.

Her sable dress heightened the extreme delicacy of her face and brought out its pallor with a vivid intensity.

"Welcome to Glenthorn, cousin!" she said, winningly, as a tall, regal girl, clad in costly silks and crapes, stepped out of the carriage.

She gave a supercilious glance at her cousin, merely taking the tips of her fingers for one moment, and dropping them coldly.

"I am thankful all these deaths are over before we arrived. It would have been a kind of charnel house to me!"

Rennie positively shrank back in terror from this cold-hearted, imperious girl; she felt there existed an icy barrier between them that moment.

Sir William, a dark, square-jawed man, with keen, dark eyes and thick eyebrows that gave him a saturnine expression, shook hands with Jack and Rennie, then passed through the drawn-up line of servants, his daughter on his arm, with a cold, haughty mien that conveyed,—

"Keep your place menials, and remember I am master in every sense here."

"He's not altered a jot except to be a little older," Winter said to herself, as she peeped through the rank, stolidly keeping in the background. "His face is just as hard and his eyes as vindictive. It isn't Eliza Winter that will bow and scrape to him!"

Her companions bowed and curtsied respectfully, in spite of her insubordination.

"His daughter is a chip of the old block. My sweet pet will never get on with her!"

CHAPTER IV.

"Not to be found, Mr. Dyson? But you say my father placed it in that escutcheon."

"That is where he always kept it under lock and key. I saw him lay it here beneath this packet. It is incomprehensible, for I am as certain as I am now talking to you that he never destroyed it," the lawyer remarked, earnestly.

"It was a ridiculous will to make from what you tell me, one that in a moment of sound reason he evidently destroyed," Sir William said, in a tone of relief.

"I beg to differ, Sir William. Nothing could convince me that he would die and leave his two orphaned grandchildren helpless on the world's mercy!"

"Whether you believe it or not it is an undisputed fact," the Baronet retorted, loftily. "You have turned out every place, hole and corner you will admit, and this seal have, I presume, never been tampered with?"

"No; I found them just as I left them. Besides, whose interest would it be, supposing I had not even taken that precaution, to steal the will?"

"Then rest assured my view of the case is correct. My father, in a momentary fit of repentance for leaving so unjust a will—I must say unjust, painful as it is to speak thus of the dead—got rid of it."

"If your theory is right, Sir William, it was done with the intention of making another, which his sudden death prevented. All I can say is, I am deeply sorry for his grandchildren; it will be a terrible blow to them."

The Baronet did not reply; he very coolly looked up the escurtoire in a way to hint the conversation was at an end. Mr. Dyson bowed and took his leave to catch the up-train for London, a cloud of perplexity on his face he could not dispel, and a soft corner in his heart for that winsome, black-clad girl who had placed her hands in his, and thanked him so gratefully for his kindness to her on the day of the funeral in relieving her of all care and worry.

Not a syllable escaped either Jack or her when their uncle acquainted them with the fatal news; they seemed petrified, turned into stone. At last Rennie burst the letters that froze all speech, and gasped,—

"Then we are beggars, and my poor brother is blind!"

"That is the state of the case," he rejoined, coolly. "Of course you know what your Bible tells you, 'The sins of the father fall upon the children,' and—"

"Forbear, sir! I will not stand by and hear my dear parents condemned by you!" Jack cried, wrathfully. "Who are you that you dare to assume the Divine prerogative of judging your fellow-men?"

"You are certainly very insolent! I should advise you to adopt a milder tone when addressing your elders!" he retorted, sarcastically. "That you have cause to feel aggrieved I can quite understand, but I fail to see how I am the cause of your ire."

"Do not, I implore you, say any more," Rennie faltered, clinging to Jack in a paroxysm of alarm lest he should say something more to increase the breach between their uncle and themselves.

"Do you think I care for what a stripling says?" the Baronet sneered.

"If my grandfather had been alive you would never have inherited his dead daughter or her children!" he said, fearlessly. "If I had my eight this misfortune would have had no effect on me—I could have worked, ay, night and day—with a cheerful spirit to keep my sister from a galling existence of dependence among people who are aliens to us, whose natures are in direct opposition to ours."

"Your tongue, young sir, will get you into mischief unless you take my advice, and remember the old axiom that speech may be silver, but silence is golden. If you expect any charity at my hands you will have to be less insolent and presumptuous!"

"Charity!" the lad repeated, scarcely believing he heard aright. "Do you taunt us already because we are poor and friendless?"

Is not our bitter lot enough to bear without this last crowning indignity?"

"What do you mean by charity, Sir William?" put in Rennie, her blue eyes turning purple with anger. "Is the bread we are eating, and the roof which sheltered our poor mother from her cradle, to be henceforth a place where malice and hatred usurps the love and trustfulness of a sweet, dead past? Rather than submit to your insults and tyranny I would become one of the varietal kitchen drudges! My spirit you shall never tame!" and her tiny, firm mouth quivered with emotion.

"I have no fancy for shrews, young or old!" he said, quietly, a dark scowl of wrath in his countenance as being defied by both nephew and niece. "Go to your room, and do not presume to appear at dinner, or in fact any meal, until you both make me an apology for your unwarrantable impertinence!"

"I would die rather!" Rennie muttered, fiercely, as she linked her arm in Jack's and left his presence, with head erect, and a mien as unyielding and haughty as his own.

Once alone by themselves Jack bowed his head in his hands, and gave himself up to bitter despair.

"We have been rash—perfect idiots—to vex Sir William!" he faltered. "I wish my tongue had been out on! Our lives will be a perpetual misery! I would not care for myself; a piece of bread and a cup of water and a dungeon is as good for me as a palace!" (this hopelessly). "It is for your sake I grieve."

"Then cease worrying about me," she rejoined, animatedly, all trace of sadness gone from her face. "I mean to be brave, and earn my own living."

"You are silly!" he said, petulantly. "Why, what could you do?"

"Lots of things if I make up my mind. Become a nurse to the sick."

"What!" he exclaimed, aghast at her words; "you, who have been the petted darling and undisputed mistress of Glenthorn! It's perfectly ridiculous!"

"Ridiculous or not, I mean to have a try for it, Mr. Job's comforter!" she said, cheerfully. "First of all I shall get dear old nurse to give you a home with her in her tiny new thatched cottage, and send you the third of my colossal salary."

"I wish you wouldn't talk twaddle!" he growled, huffily. "Why, you must be crazed—demented! Fancy a pretty girl like you being stifled up in a sick room, all smells and nastiness! Ugh! it's horrible!"

"What a picture you draw of one of the noblest duties which can fall to the lot of woman! You silly boy, look at that dear creature, Miss Nightingale, and our own Princess Alice. Surely I am no better than they in your estimation?"

"They didn't do it for bread," he retorted, somewhat sheepishly.

"Then that only strengthens my case, for it was pure love for the vocation, not lucre, that influenced those noble women to become ministering angels."

"Oh! you always have a knack of arguing with me till I haven't a word at my command," he growled, not convinced in spite of her defence.

"That shows I am right then; but I mustn't waste precious time. I have an advertisement to answer, which I fancy will just suit me."

When her letter was finished she gave a little sigh of relief, and went over to Jack and gave him a tender kiss.

"Don't be grumpy," she said, merrily. "If I don't like the life I can easily try something else you know, Jack."

The following day she had an answer from a Nursing Institute, asking her to call at her earliest opportunity.

A letter was dispatched to Locksley to meet her at the terminus.

"You must take Winter with you," Jack said, anxiously, for the idea of his sweet, win-

some sister rambling about the dangerous roads of the great city filled him with alarm.

"Oh, yes, she is coming with me," she answered, cheerily, trying to chase away his fears by assuming a brave spirit; though, in her heart of hearts, she felt terribly despondent at her prospects.

The only bright gleam in her horizon was the thought of seeing Locksley, to bask for a brief while in his dear presence and society.

That evening Geraldine Lyth swept into Rennie's boudoir, after giving a peremptory knock, and threw herself on Rennie's rose-coloured silk couch with an heir of proprietorship that amazed her.

"I have decided to make this my boudoir. I like the view better than the one I am using," she observed, coolly. "When can you let me have it?"

"When you please, Miss Lyth," she answered frigidly. "The piano is all I wish to remove."

"The piano!" Geraldine exclaimed. "It would spoil the tone of the room; it is *en suite*. That I cannot permit."

"Why?" Rennie asked, resentfully. "Do you wish to deprive me of a gift, the only one I can say I possess, made by my grandfather on my coming home from school?"

"I shall not permit you to remove furniture from my house, Rennie Allison."

"You shall not rob me of that," she retorted, defiantly. "I yield up to you everything else, but I dare you to stop its removal."

"You talk like some vixen instead of a gentlewoman," she sneered. "You permit your tongue too much freedom of speech."

"I say what I mean, and mean what I say," Rennie returned, hotly. "I am no hypocrite."

"A shrewish girl is detestable to all right-minded people's opinion," she retorted, spitefully.

"Have you tried to soften my nature. Have you not repulsed all my advances with cruel cutting contempt, till I could endure it no longer?"

"You should join the dramatic profession. You undoubtedly would draw the public, but even an actress drops her stage manners in private, and becomes the lady in repose of language and deportment. Try and take the hint," this coolly.

The irony and scorn in Geraldine's tone cut poor Rennie to the quick, for she felt she was no match for this contemptuous haughty woman.

"I must decline to continue this cruel interview, Miss Lyth," she replied, putting a powerful curb on her tongue. "If we were to talk for years I can see it would not make us better friends; and as I shall soon be away from here for ever, the less I say to wound you the easier will be my conscience in the future; but understand me, that piano leaves with me."

There was such a firm calm expression on that rosy mouth and in those deep blue eyes that Miss Lyth felt unable to cope with her any longer; so she rose, shook out her silk train, and left the room, feeling she had not triumphed over that little vixen Rennie, for that was the title she gave her.

"Papa," she observed, later on, "is it not great impertinence of Rennie Allison to say she is going to remove the piano out of her boudoir. Will you permit this outrage?"

"What reason does she assign for such unseemly conduct?" he asked gravely.

"She says she is going away, and that grandpa gave her the piano."

"Then, my dear, we had best let her take it. She is so spiteful that a scene would be the result if we opposed her. Where does she say she is going?"

"To earn her living, so she says," she rejoined tartly, annoyed at being thwarted in preventing Rennie from gaining her object.

"They could have remained here if they had behaved themselves. I have not driven them away," he muttered half aloud, trying to justify his harshness to the orphans.

"Speaking candidly, I am glad they are going, papa, for then I can settle down with content, and rearrange the furniture, and plan out the alterations. It is a gruesome place as it is; that tapestry, too, in the dining-room is so heavy and dull. I want a pale green paper enriched with plenty of gold for the walls, and the picture frames reglit. Everything looks so ancient."

He looked at the handsome, defiant beauty with a proud smile, as he thought never had there reigned a fairer or more imperious mistress than his own stately daughter, and returned affectionately,—

"Whatever you wish, Geraldine, shall be done. I have no one to consider but you; next season you must be presented at Court. You will be one of the belles, if I am not mistaken."

"I shall endeavour to do credit to our name I promise you, papa," her eyes lighting up at the prospect of her future triumphs.

CHAPTER V.

"You have come, Looksey!" Rennie said joyously as he stepped up to the carriage, and assisted her and Winter to alight.

"Do you think I could have denied myself the happiness of looking once more on one so dear to me," he whispered ardently, leading them both into the hotel, where he had ordered a tempting lunch to be in readiness for his guests.

He felt deeply concerned when he saw the ravages her trials had made in that sweet, saucy face, and of course attributed it to fretting over her bereavement, for she had not even hinted in her letters at the domestic unhappiness she was enduring.

"How kind you are to think of us!" Rennie remarked with a smile, the first one that had illumined her said young face since the death of her grandfather.

Over the repast they laughed and chatted as merry as kittens forgetful for the moment of all care and sorrow.

But, alas! the dread time crept on, when the altered state of her affairs must be confessed when Looksey commenced.

"To what lucky star do I owe this more than pleasure? Shopping, or what?"

"I forgot all when I met you," she said with a sigh; "It was all so like old times, you know. The fact is, I—I am now only a dependent on my uncle, and it galls me, so I have come to town to get my own living."

"You!" he exclaimed, astounded at her words.

"It is too true; Jack and I are beggars. It seems the will grandpa made is lost. At all events, it cannot be found. Mr. Dyson's theory is that he destroyed it, intending to make another, and died before he could do so."

"This is terrible, but in Heaven's name what do you intend to do?" he said, gravely, all the light fading from his face at the thought of his darling battling with the world alone with her dainty beauty and innocence.

"I have answered an advertisement for—a nurse's place at an institution in Covent Garden. They are going to teach me my duties. Of all positions I prefer this. It is so comforting, you know, to be of service to your fellow-creatures, to soothe and heal their sufferings; it takes you out of one's self, and that is what I am craving for—forgetfulness!"

"Give up this crazy, sunbeam, and link your fate to mine?" he pleaded, excitedly.

"You forget, Jack. He is my sole care now," she interposed, firmly. "He must never help to drag you down now that your foot is gradually ascending the ladder. No, no, Looksey; we must be patient. Everything comes to those who wait!"

"Sometimes death!" he put in, bitterly.

"Even that may be a blessing in disguise to many a weary heart," she returned.

Before he said good-bye he tried every

argument he was capable of to alter her determination, but she was firm in her resolve to go forth into the stern, hard world as a bread-winner, brave as a young nature always is who has never known its buffets or cruel indifference.

True to her word, she made her way to the institute, and won upon the matron the moment she looked into the sweet, innocent face of the girl; and in a few days she found herself garbed in a neat brown gown, with a snowy apron and cap, learning how to bandage wounds and dress them in a professional way, to fit her for hospital duty; and a most adept pupil she became, winning golden opinions from the matron and the doctors.

Her letters to Jack were bright, hopeful ones, so also were those she posted weekly to Looksey, detailing her happiness in her mission, as she styled it.

Months flew by, and still Rennie wrote bright, encouraging letters. One contained news that sent Looksey's pulses beating with pleasure, for it told him news which gave him hope.

"At last I have found a great oculist," it ran on, "who has promised to see Jack. His fee is fifty guineas for an operation, but he has actually consented to forego it. Did you ever hear of such generosity? I am in the seventh heaven of delight, because he cured a little girl who had a sudden blight, just like Jack's! Oh, Looksey! my joy and gratitude knows no bounds in finding such a friend!"

"Heaven be praised!" he exclaimed, fervently kissing the letter with a lover's fond rhapsody. "If Jack's sight should be restored my darling will be mine, and Jack shall become a solicitor, and find me in briefs!" and he plunged his elbows on his knees, and gave himself up to delicious dreams of future bliss, where the presiding fairy was a sweet, winsome girl-woman, with tender blue eyes, and a rosy mouth, which whispered, "Dearest husband!" ever so softly, and then the delightful music of tiny, pattering feet fell upon his ear, and baby voices cooed papa, and held out soft, dimpled arms to him; then the curly head drooped lower, and he passed into real dreamland, with his treasured letter clasped in his hand.

CHAPTER VI.

"AND YOU really wish to be present and assist nurse?" a benign, silver-haired man observed, seriously.

"Oh, yes, doctor! if you will permit me?" Rennie said, eagerly.

"It will be a very trying ordeal, perhaps a painful one, as we cannot always ensure success. You know, human skill is sometimes baffled."

"I will be content to bear the consequences, whatever they may be. If you succeed, I shall be near him to share his great joy; if it is ruled otherwise, I shall be his comforter!"

"You are a good girl and a brave one," the great oculist said warmly, "keep up heart and hope. I have every hope myself."

Tears swam in her eyes, big crystal drops of gratitude, and she faltered as she caught his slim white hand and kissed it fervently,—

"Heaven bless you for your kindness to two fatherless ones!"

Somehow those kisses, and those pretty eyes laden with grateful tears, brought an answering moisture to his keen, dark eyes, and the hand, on which fell her dewy kisses, seemed very precious, for he murmured as he stepped into his carriage,—

"That little nurse has made a regular old fool of me! If I were twenty years younger I should certainly run off with her to the nearest church!"

Sir Archibald Sinclair was not the only victim who had succumbed under the spell of her witcheries; for several students and young surgeons had striven their hardest to win an answering smile from the lovely young nurse without success.

In a handsome consulting room in Burlington-street sat Jack Allison; by his side was Rennie, clasping his hand, and whispering words of hope and comfort.

Soon the short *tête-à-tête* was broken by the entrance of Sir Archibald Sinclair, followed by two other eminent oculists.

With set features and firm little mouth Rennie watched the Baronet administer the chloroform. Then, with palpitating heart and dazed brain, she waited upon the doctors as if she were in a dream, noiselessly, speechlessly, yet deftly. At last the awful silence which seemed to freeze her veins was broken, and the great oculist said,—

"The operation is finished, my dear, and I have great hopes of the result."

Then the pent-up agony found relief in a flood of tears.

"See, he is coming to himself!" he said in about a quarter of an hour's time, and she fell on her knees, and whispered loving words in Jack's ear as consciousness resumed its sway, and a faint tinge of colour came into his face.

The eyes were bandaged and the room darkened.

"Shall I see?" he asked, faintly. "Oh, sir, it hasn't all been in vain, has it?"

"No, the doctor has great hopes, Jack dear," she answered, softly.

"But it is still dark," he moaned.

"Be patient, dear, the result is to be tested in a very short time; they dare not expose you to the light all at once."

One, two, three hours rolled by slothfully, then Sir Archibald entered the room quietly, and opened one of the heavy green curtains, and unfastened the bandage just for one brief moment.

"Now, my lad, what can you see?" he asked, with a world of anxiety in his voice.

"I can see a gleam of light!" he shouted, ecstatically. "Oh, doctor, I shall die with joy!"

"Oh, no you won't, my boy! You will live to be a guard and protector to your sister!" the baronet said huskily, as he replaced the bandage. "The greatest caution must be observed (this to Rennie), the battle is nearly won, but still there are contingencies to guard against; but I leave those in your hands with perfect trust and confidence."

"Which I will be worthy of," she said, tremulously, as he patted the bonny little head, and took those two pretty dimpled hands in his, and gazed at them wistfully, and whispered,—

"You are a little golden-haired fairy! The old house has never looked so bright as it does to-day! Heaven bless you, child!" and, to her surprise, she felt a fatherly kiss on her forehead, and the caress filled her with a quiet joy. It reminded her of her fond old grandfather, whose affection had moulded her into so sweet and gracious a woman.

A week after the operation, Jack was pronounced cured and permitted to go without his bandage, but spectacles of a dark green shade took its place.

One afternoon Looksey called to see the patient; his anxiety to know the truth was intense, and Rennie's letters, though latent with hope, still at times were vague, for she dared not indulge in too much happiness lest it should be crushed in the bud.

He was shown in the drawing-room, a perfect museum of curiosities raked from every country under the sun; before though he could fix his attention on one object in particular, Rennie entered noiselessly and stood before him in her brown merino gown, white cap and apron, lawn cuffs and collar—her hospital garb.

He stood in blank astonishment gazing at the dainty little figure, then gathering her in his arms he kissed the rosy lips and threaded his fingers through the soft tendrils of flesh that strayed coyly over her broad brow in his old lover-like fashion.

"My little sunbeam!" he exclaimed ardently, "do you know that for the mem

I thought you were some sweet saint, you never looked fairer?"

Hot red blushes leapt into her face, even to her waxen ears, for his eyes seemed to devour her.

"Do not flinch from me, darling!" he said, tremulously. "If you only knew how I have hungered for a sight of your dear face. Why have you been so cruel?"

"I thought it best for us not to meet, because, you see, I never dreamt Jack's sight would be cured; even now it seems a miracle."

"Then he is cured?" he repeated, eagerly.

"Yes, he can almost see even now as well as you or I, thanks to one of the kindest, cleverest, and most generous of men. Oh, Locksley, what a debt of gratitude we owe Sir Sinclair! If my life could repay it I feel I should give it!"

"I hope not," laughed her lover, "since that belongs to me, or rather as long as Heaven permits me to hold the treasure. Do you know, sweetheart, I am actually promised a brief. Only fancy how I shall fight, now my Sunbeam is once again my very own, to spur me on to victory. I feel I shall achieve success. Will you endorse my opinion or box my ears for my vanity?" this saucily.

"I'll take you to Jack and see what he says, sir," she returned, archly.

"What, Locksley! my dear old boasting chum and guide!" Jack cried, delightedly, as he grasped the hands of his old friend, and gazed yearningly into the handsome, frank face which was now positively beaming with happiness. "This is more than jolly; and oh! what a splendid fellow you are!"

"You will make me blush!" laughed Locksley. "I'm awfully modest, you know!"

"You are as near alike what I pictured you as two peas. Besides, I had a graphic description of you from sis."

"Cease, sir, telling tales out of school," interposed Rennie, "or I shall bandage those saucy eyes up again; remember I, as your nurse, am armed with no end of power."

They gabbled away like a trio of magpies, till Locksley remembered he had overstayed the time for a call, and Rennie also remembered, too, that Jack and she were only guests of the Baronet's, entertained out of the largeness of his kind heart.

"What shall you do now?" he asked, anxiously, as he stood bidding her good-bye.

"I am going back to the hospital. They wrote only yesterday saying how I am missed," for she had taken up her duties as a regular hospital nurse for some considerable time.

"It cuts me to the quick to hear you say that. It seems horrible for you so young and lovely to be associated with the sick and maimed."

"It is woman's mission," she interposed, gently; "besides, consider the happiness my association there has brought to Jack!"

"True! I had forgotten. Pray forgive me," he said, penitently. "If ever I get rich I will not forget the haven that has sheltered my love and been the means of restoring Jack's sight."

She strained her blue eyes to watch his graceful form till it faded into a dark speck, and then turned with a little sigh to confront Sir Archibald Sinclair who had entered quietly.

"I have been talking to the matron at the hospital about you," he commented.

"Indeed, Sir Archibald. I suppose she is a little put out at my long absence from duty?" she replied.

"She is certainly very anxious to have you back. It seems you have many friends, child, there."

"I am more than grateful," she said, earnestly, "to them one and all."

"My dear," (this hesitatingly) I trust you will not deem me prying or curious, but I have a great desire to learn why one so fitted for a brighter existence should choose such a gruesome task as nursing the sick. You are intelligent, marvellously so, and gifted."

"I may lay claim to a few gifts, Sir Archibald, but I am friendless, homeless, so I chose this life; it seemed one of peace and safety, and I have every reason to bless the hour I did so, for I met you through it."

"And you are going back to that wretched drudgery," he murmured, half aloud, "to immerse your sweetness in a house of tears and groans? Ugh! (and he shuddered) it's too revolting! Rennie, fairy child, stay and bless me and my home with your sunny presence. I am a widower of twenty years. I lost my darling when the first snow clothed the earth after our wedding, and never have I seen a woman I could put in her place; there she is before you."

Rennie looked up and saw the portrait of one of the fairest girls her imagination had ever conceived, standing at a stile with a basket of deep red roses in her hands. Heavenly blue eyes were bent lovingly on a large deerhound at her feet, and one delicate hand was laid on its splendid brown head.

"A week after our wedding-day she stood as you see her," he said, with a sigh.

"How lovely!" she murmured, in awe. "I have often wondered who so beautiful a being was. How you must have suffered."

"I went mad," he said, hoarsely. "I even presumed to blame my Creator. I was young, hot-headed and rash, but calm came at last, found only by a growing love for science, and from that time I lived to benefit my fellow-creatures. My whole nature was absorbed in its intricacies, and I became famous. Every cure I effected I dedicated to my angel spirit, who I pictured looking down from her celestial home with approval, and now when the snows of winter cover my head I have found one I would fain put in my lost darling's place."

He drew near her and gathered the small face in his hands to read his answer. His whole frame trembled when he saw those temples of the soul, so sombre in their anguish at the pain she knew she must inflict on one she revered before all men.

"Ask me to serve you night or day, to be to you a faithful servant, or child," she said, with a sob that would not be suppressed.

"Then my foolish old man's dream is to remain one," he said, sadly. "May will not consent to mate with chill, grim winter."

"It is not that. I love you!—I love you!" she cried, deprecatingly; "but it is the sacred feeling that only a daughter can bestow. I am the affianced wife of one whose life is bound up in my fealty."

"And you love him?" he said, gently.

"Yes, I love him," she repeated, meekly, sweet confusion in those eyes that now fell beneath his inquiring gaze.

"May Heaven grant he may prove worthy of so sweet a wife!" he answered, tenderly. "If he were my son I should say he was thrice blessed in his choice. Now go to Jack, little fairy, and forget an old man's dream."

"I should forget I breathed before I could forget you!" she said, ardently, bending down and smothering his hand with kisses.

"It is very hard," he sighed, wearily, as the patter of her feet faded away, "to love and lose so fair a bud, when I thought, too, it was mine to pluck and wear. My earthly pilgrimage must be completed alone; farewell to my second and last romance. It was but human love; one who seemed created by the Divine essence, whose every expression is a fresh poem—a new delight!—bah! it is sheer madness to dwell upon it! I must pull myself together, there is forgetfulness in work—in work," and with laggard, weary tread he went to his study, to seek oblivion among his heavy tomes, and further his researches for the good and glory of his profession and Master, whose faithful servant he had tried to be.

In a few days after the Baronet's proposal, Rennie made an excuse to return to the hospital, and take up her old life; she felt diffident and ashamed to come constantly in contact with her benefactor. He made no demur. So Jack travelled back to Hampshire

to recover his strength before he entered on the business of life as put before him by Locksley Tringham.

Christmas came with its merry face, especially so at the hospital, where it was kept up right royally.

Rennie's dimpled fingers were kept busy fashioning garlands and wreaths, and conceiving the most brilliant flowers out of tissue paper.

She was the presiding fairy of the whole festivities, and, strange to relate, she had hosts of helpers in the so-called sterner sex, who flew about here, there, and everywhere at a mere look from the fair mistress of the revels.

The matron smiled covertly at the willing knights, and marvelled much at the strange apathy her favourite evinced to one and all.

"What a peculiar child it is!" she said, mischievously, as she gave her a kiss and wished her a happy Christmas, "there were three devoted knights last night waiting to wish you all kinds of good things, and you ran away, leaving them in despair. I shall have some broken-hearted patients soon, as well as broken-limbed ones."

"I was tired, and wanted to be fresh for to-day, dear sister," she replied, apologetically. "There's the concert you know, and the dance, and the children's ward is not yet completed."

"Well, come, busybee, and have breakfast," the matron said, affectionately; "all our patients are to have ham and eggs for a treat, that can eat it; and we have some broiled with poached eggs. Christmas morning only comes once a year, you know."

Arm linked in arm, like mother and daughter, they both entered the comfortable sitting room, where a hissing urn spluttered, and the fragrant odour of coffee, mingled with that of delicious ham and toast, and the pictures round the walls peeped from their green-adorned frames merrily, and the blazing fire frolicked up the chimney to the accompaniment of a huge white cat's song, who lay stretched out full length on the hearth-rug.

While she turned her back for an instant Rennie took the opportunity to slip a tiny packet by the side of her plate, containing a pearl ring—her Christmas gift.

That night she had three offers from love-sick swains, who were sent one and all away kindly, yet firmly, to their chagrin.

The joyous young leaves burst forth from their parent branches, whispering soft nothings, like lovers, to the balmy wind, while blue-bells and daffodils nodded at each other in the glades and thickets, over the less gorgeous but simpler snowdrop and violet, when Rennie's health broke down, and the physicians ordered her a thorough rest and change.

So she made up her mind to spend her well-earned holiday at nurse Winter's, who was simply crazed with joy to have her pet once more under her charge.

Heaven's choicest blessings were showered down on her young head the day she bade her numerous friends good-bye. Little gifts, from a pen-wiper made by weak little childish hands to a pretty gold watch and chain, subscribed by the whole nursing staff, were presented to her, and tears found their way to her eyes as the rickety four-wheel cab with her belongings jolted off from the home where she had found so many friends who appreciated and loved her for herself alone.

"I shall miss you very much child, but the time will soon pass, and I shall, I trust, have you back again with a good crop of Hampshire roses on your cheeks," were the matron's last words, as she kissed Rennie.

"Please Heaven, yes," was the pensive answer, "I shall never forget you, dear, dear sister."

"Dear me, how silly I am," ejaculated that lady, as she dashed away the moisture which sprang to her eyes as she ascended the flight of white stone steps, "that child has wound

herself around my heart in a way that is astonishing."

CHAPTER VII.

"HURRAH!" shouted Jack, as Rennie sprang out of the train. "Here's nurse, sis," as the good woman, resplendent in her best grey silk gown, and black lace bordered shawl, ran as fast as her aged limbs could bear her to greet her guest.

"Welcome, birdie, dear," she said, fondly, "it's a pale lily you've returned, but I'll soon see what fresh eggs and cream will do to make you rosy again."

"I know I shall soon get strong under your care, Nanny. I feel better already. There is no air so fresh and fragrant as that of dear old Hampshire!"

After a delicious repast of spring chicken, home made brawn, crisp early lettuce, short cakes, as light as thistle down, and a bowl of whipped cream, the last named delicacy in honour of Rennie, Jack proposed a stroll to Glenthorn, which was deserted by the Baronet and his daughter.

They were peeping through the side gate, when Gough, spying them, hurried towards them in a state of jubilant pleasure.

"Why, mercy on us, if it isn't the young master and missus!" he ejaculated. "I am mighty glad to see you both, and you, sir, too, with yer two eyes as right as ninepence."

"Thanks, Gough, for your welcome," Rennie said, kindly. "It is a blessing my brother's eyes are restored, and I feel sure you are glad."

Jack shook the old man's hand cordially, and observed, gleefully,—

"Yes, I can see through a nine inch wall now, Gough;"

"Well, come and see the houses and dogs, they'll be mighty pleased to see yer both."

"Nothing I should like better," they both exclaimed in one breath.

"So you shall," he said, leading the way with alacrity. "Dash it all, miss, and master Jack, I'd have the great hall-door fly open like a shark's jaw, if I had my will."

"Sir William and my cousin are in London," she interposed, to stop Gough's garrulousness.

"Yes, they be having high jinks at the Queen's own palace, so they tells me up at the house. Miss Lyth was asked to see the Queen and kissed her hand, so the women folk said, but, dang it, I don't remember all the fine doings they read to me. Thismuch I do know, we was all troated like dirt before she became friends with Queen Victoria, and now I expect she'll hick us for being bold enough to show our vulgar faces."

"What a droll fellow you are," said Rennie, with a smile. "I am sure Miss Lyth must be very hard to please when you fail."

"Ma please the Missus!" he chuckled, with a broad grin. "Why she tosses her head in the air like a camel, and catches up her frock, and says, 'Gough, keep your distance, please, the odor of the stables clings to your clothes.'"

"What a mimic you are," laughed Jack, "it's evident they have not changed you if they have the place."

Baron was visited first. The glossy creature neighed and placed his nose in his customary fashion of old in Rennie's hand and bosom, for he recognised her voice as soon as she entered his box.

Gough ran off to his loft and brought her some sugar which she fed her favourite with. Then after a dozen hugs she left the fine old fellow and sought the kennels, where she spent a real happy half-hour among her old canine friends, who leaped, danced, barked, yapped and frisked about her, mad with delight.

"I am glad I did not put anything very nice on," she observed, ruefully, as she surveyed her dress, which was somewhat soiled after her visit.

"Wait till I become a solicitor!" Jack said, proudly. "I'll buy you the prettiest

gowns that ever were seen. Looksley says I am making great progress. I am studying as hard as I can for an exam. I mean to be a swell one, none of your pettifoggish attorneys, you know."

"You seem to forget that Mr. Solicitor sometimes finds a Mrs. Solicitor," she laughed, looking at the enthusiastic, boyish face regisly.

"No lady will ever supplant you in my heart, sis! There will only be one darling Kennie in the world for me!"

That first day down in her rural home was very sweet to her, and never had she felt happier, with that serene calm, born of perfect security than when Winter kissed and left her in her snowy little bed amid the scent of flowers and lavender.

Spring melted into summer, hot, glorious summer, when the sun rained down its amber columns, opening wide the innocent buds into gorgeous flowers.

Rennie's holiday was nearly over, and Looksley had come to spend a few days at Glenthorn with his fiancée—precious halcyon ones to the lovers, who sauntered about the woods and glades, conversing in low, murmuring tones their plans for the future, in which figured always Jack and faithful Winter.

One delightful afternoon in July, when scarcely a ripple played on the surface of the sea, Rennie and Looksley, accompanied by Jack, took a boat to commemorate their last outing before their return to London.

"I want you to do me a favour, Rennie—to sing us a song," said Looksley, coaxingly.

"As it is our last pleasure-outing, I fain must obey, sir," she retorted, playfully.

Then her clear voice rang out on the sunny sea, and mingled with the splash, splash of the oars, these quaint words,—

"Sweetly murmuring summer sea,
Go tell the one best loved by me
That still he holds my heart in thrall,
That still to me he's all in all."

They were all so intent on the ballad and the enjoyment of the hour, that they did not notice a frail little craft floating near them, its only occupant a lady, who had lost all control over it.

Rennie was just about to commence another verse, when she cried out in alarm,—

"See! look! That little skiff is in danger! The lady is in peril, and cannot manage it!"

As Jack and Looksley turned and looked, a cry of terror came ringing across to them, transfixing the trio with horror.

"Save me! save me! for the love of Heaven!" shrieked the helpless girl.

"She'll be lost!" cried Rennie, suddenly wringing her hands. "See, Looksley, she has only one oar! Oh! it is too terrible!"

"Be calm, my love!" he gasped, white to the lips, for the danger was appalling, as the girl had, in her frenzy of fright, jumped up in the boat, which rocked to and fro fearfully.

"Row for dear life!" urged Jack, setting his teeth together, and away their boat cleaved the gleaming waters just as the tiny skiff capsized, precipitating its unhappy owner into its treacherous depths.

Before Jack or Looksley could stay her purpose, Rennie leaped into the sea, and swam out to the drowning girl.

She saw two white hands, glimmering with diamonds, clutching hold of the overturned boat, and she cried out,—

"Hold on, in Heaven's name! Help is near!"

"I—I am sinking!" was the despairing answer.

But by this time Rennie had reached her, and the two girls stared at each other in speechless amazement as she grasped the skirt of her dress.

"Do not cling round my neck, or we shall both be lost!" she entreated. "Help is near! See, you are saved!" as Jack and Looksley arrived on the scene, and extricated the pair from their perilous position.

"Cousin, I am indebted to you for my life!" said Geraldine Lyth, for it was she Rennie had rescued, she said, faintly, as soon as she had strength enough to speak.

"I am thankful I was some use to you," Rennie returned.

"Can you ever forgive me my harshness in the past, Rennie?" she asked, tremulously.

"Freely—fully, Geraldine," she answered, heartily.

"Then we will be sisters from this moment," Geraldine whispered, pressing her preserver's hand fervently.

Looksley administered some sherry to revive them, and rowed back to shore, while Geraldine related how the accident occurred.

"I am to blame, no one else," she observed. "It was all through my own wilfulness. I made up my mind to row myself, and sent off my man angrily, for his interference, having perfect faith in my own strength; but a stiff breeze came on all of a sudden after I had got well out at sea, then I became nervous, and my boat seemed to swirl about, and in righting it the oar snapped in half, and as I was trying with all my strength to turn shorewards, I caught a crab which hurled me off the seat and nearly stunned me; all nerve deserted me and I jumped up with terror and screamed for help, seeing your boat at a distance; but I thought perhaps you had not heard me, and I gave myself up in sheer despair," and she shuddered at the awful peril she had escaped so miraculously.

"You are safe now," Rennie interposed kindly.

"Yes, praise Heaven!" Geraldine responded, solemnly. "Oh! death is awful when you feel it is closing around you stealthily but surely, and you are not prepared to meet it. I wouldn't go through that torture again to gain a kingdom!" and the proud arrogant beauty's eyes were melted with softness, for they glistened with grateful tears for her deliverance.

That exquisite moment of peril, when she hovered over the brink of eternity wrought a change in her nature a host of priests or prelates could never have accomplished. What warning had visited her in that supreme moment, when her life, as it were, was suspended by a thread, she never revealed; but softness usurped the place of harshness, and kindness that of almost cruelty, and the regal, stately Geraldine, became a gracious, affectionate woman, yielding and sweet, a perfect opposite to her former self.

"Where, oh where is my bracelet?" cried Rennie, in distress, at once missing the gift of her dead aunt off her arm.

Jack and Looksley immediately began searching for it energetically.

"It must have got unclasped and fallen into the sea when you went out to Miss Lyth," suggested Looksley, regretfully.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! What a misfortune!" exclaimed poor Rennie, ruefully.

"It was dear mamma's, too! I wouldn't have lost it for anything!"

As they were all landing, Looksley espied a glittering something in the fold of a wet lace wrap that had been cast off Geraldine's shoulder.

"Here's your bracelet, Rennie!" he shouted gaily, holding it up triumphantly. "By Jove, why what is this?" he added, as a secret spring beneath the pearl heart became unfastened, and something fell at his feet.

"What a funny thing!" Rennie said. "I declare I have tried many a time to unstop it but couldn't manage it."

Geraldine stooped and picked up the packet and opened it, when to their surprise, it contained a tiny gold key.

"This is evidently the key to some mystery," she exclaimed, "for this is a kind of letter," spreading out the thin foreign paper carefully, and reading out the following words,—

"Niece Rennie, and nephew Jack, the day your father led your mother to the altar, I swore to be revenged on their offspring.

Knowing where my father kept his will, I stole it, and hid it in the ebony casket that stood beside my bed. This is the key; I only hope you may be old and grey when this is found, if it is ever. Your wronged, unhappy kinswoman.—ELEANOR LYTH.

"This explains all," Jack said, excitedly, "and the effort aunt made to confess the truth when death seized her."

"Yes," exclaimed Rennie, "poor thing, she was repentant when it was too late. How terribly she must have suffered!"

"Is this not the hand of fate?" Geraldine said in awe. "You saved my life, and I was the first one to read of a restored inheritance to one who richly deserves it!"

That night was a joyous one for the inmates of the thatched cottage, for the will was found in the casket, it being treasured up safely having belonged to Rennie's mother and placed with Winter among other relics.

Sir William met Jack and Rennie the next day with outstretched hands and said with feeling, which was foreign to his cold nature: "Let the hatchet be buried, and accept my grateful thanks, Rennie Allison, for saving my child!"

"We are only too glad, both Jack and I, to be friends—friends and kindred!" Rennie answered, earnestly.

There was perfect concord and peace between them at last, and the Baronet evinced no regret at the large slice he was compelled to surrender from his income; so Rennie and Jack became the happy possessors of five thousand a-year each, and Lookley returned to London and fought out his case with such acumen and energy that he won it, to the amazement even of his own client who knew his venture was hazardous and risky.

His maiden speech was the talk of the day; it was eloquent and yet concise, a piece of rhetoric latent with suppressed power that gained him his verdict without a dissentient voice; but his heart and soul was in his task, he had determined to win a name to lay at the feet of his lovely bride; for her sweet sake he fought and won bravely—nobly.

A year has passed away since he led her to the altar, and Rennie, now a charming matron, was seated in a low chair on a delicious stretch of lawn fringed with glorious roses; by her side was Winter, with a bundle of dainty lace, in her lap a tiny waxen hand reveals the truth as it lies in the plump one of its nurse, looking like a miniature snowflake in the large, useful one.

Geraldine floated towards them, looking more beautiful than ever in her zephyr lace dress; Jack was beside her loaded up with roses and lilies.

"Where are you going to put all those floral treasures?" laughed Rennie Tringham.

"Bank up the chimney-pieces and every space, nook and cranny with them, of course," she replied, animatedly. "My nephew can only be christened once, and I mean it to be a right royal christening!" stooping over the tiny morsel and kissing it tenderly.

There was a little cry of pleasure from Rennie as her husband drove through the carriage entrance accompanied by Sir William and Sir Sinclair Archibald, both come as guests to honour the occasion.

Sir Archibald was to be godfather and Geraldine godmother to the son and heir of the house of Tringham.

"I must make an oonist of him!" laughed Sir Archibald, as he patted the velvety cheek of the king of the hour.

"I could wish him no better fate, Sir Archibald," Rennie replied, sweetly, gazing at him with a wealth of affection.

"Luncheon is ready, m'am," said a trim housemaid, coming on the scene, white satin ribbons flying from cap and apron.

Lookley put his wife's hand in his arm and with infinite love and tenderness led her to the house, for she was not quite strong yet, it being early days.

"Darling," he murmured, "look up at those

golden clouds, how glorious they are; they appear to be shimmering in a sea of pearls, but even their splendour does not, in my eyes, eclipse you, my sweet 'Sunbeam,' for you brought Jack from darkness to light and me to a veritable paradise!"

[THE END.]

A MONKEY SHOW.

Mr. Ozer graphically describes an encounter with a troop of monkeys in the Mountains of Grenada. They were coming down a cliff by way of the vines which covered its face. "There were old monkeys," he says, "fathers of families, with serious countenances, cautiously feeling their way and sniffing the air; matronly monkeys, with young ones clinging about their necks, a world of care and responsibility in their faces; young and frisky monkeys, who came trooping down, hand under hand, snatching at a tail here and there, or tweaking an ear, as they tumbled over the slow-going parents, stopping a second now and then to bite the tail of some unfortunate baby, who would instantly set up a howl of anguish."

In a little while one of the troop reached the tree under which we sat, a young male about half grown. The negro boy at my side urged me, in excited whispers, to shoot! He, at least, had no misgivings on the score of relationship, though the resemblance between the two—the monkey in the tree and the monkey on the ground—was strong enough to excite a smile. I think the monkey in the tree must have noticed this resemblance, for he saw us just then, and stopped. The longer he contemplated my companion, the stronger seemed to become his conviction that he had found a long-lost brother. He let himself down by his tail, and beckoned for the negro to come up; and then began a series of evolutions that would have shamed an acrobat; all, evidently, with a desire of impressing his brother with the superior advantages of an arboreal life.

The little sinner beside me was all this time urging me to shoot that innocent animal in the tree, whose only fault consisted in being a monkey. But I could not. I should as soon have thought of shooting the clown who performed for my amusement.

I now regarded the whole thing as the "biggest show on earth," as an advertiser has it, and would not sully the pure enjoyment of it by what, I could not help thinking, would be murder in the first degree.

The little man in the tree swung himself into space and disappeared; in a few minutes he came skipping along, followed by a monkey of maturer years, evidently his mother, about whose neck was dangling an infant a few months old. To her the delighted reprobate pointed us out, inquiring in monkey language, probably, if those objects below were not "a man and a brother."

What a look of horror convulsed the old lady's face when she caught sight of us! She turned about with such violence as to jerk loose the infant, who fell to the ground. Maternal solicitude even could not arrest her flight, as she fled chattering to the vine-ladder, and hurriedly ascended it, followed by her wandering son. Jim darted forward to secure the youngster, but the latter was too agile, and gathered himself up and made off in safety.

The old *Victory*, Nelson's famous flagship, will cost over £10,000 for repairs, according to the report just made on her condition. Most of her bottom planking is good sound elm which will last for many a year to come, but the sides are rotten, and must be planked throughout with hard wood. Thus it will be three months before the *Victory* occupies her old position in Portsmouth harbour.

FAIRLY CORNERED.

—O—

I WAS sent to arrest a young man named George Harding, on a charge of having stolen money, bonds, and jewels from the house of Mr. Morton Ward, a rich London banker.

The robbery had taken place on the previous night, and these were the details as Mr. Ward gave them in his evidence,—

He resided in a villa at Twickenham, and had that evening returned home unexpectedly, after an absence of two days.

It was late when he arrived; but, feeling no inclination to sleep, as soon as his wife and the servants had retired, he went into his study to look over the correspondence which had accumulated since his departure.

A couple of hours passed in the perusal and writing of letters, and the examination of some long lists of accounts which had been prepared for his inspection. He was disturbed by a sound as of a door softly closing on the ground-floor.

He listened for an instant, thinking that probably his fancy had deceived him; but a repetition of the noise induced him to rise and go out on to the landing, which was always kept lighted the night through.

The house was divided by a wide hall, opening into a back-building, in which the dining-room and library were situated, and near the end of this corridor was a side-door that gave egress to the shrubbery.

That door stood slightly ajar.

Mr. Ward's first thought was that it had been left so by some careless servant, and that its swinging back and forth was the sound he had heard.

He passed downstairs; but, before he reached the bottom, a man darted out of the library, and disappeared through the side door.

As Mr. Ward entered the corridor, a second man came out, with whom he instantly grappled.

A brief struggle ensued, and Mr. Ward was knocked down; but he had time clearly to recognise his assailant as George Harding.

When he got on his feet, the robber had vanished, and by the time the servants were roused by the alarm-bell both men had so much the start that pursuit was useless.

A small safe which stood in a closet off the library had been opened, and the valuables were gone.

The evidence given by the butler and footman corroborated that of their master. Though neither of them had seen the burglars, Mr. Ward's torn coat and scratched hands bore witness of the struggle; and, the next morning, the footstep of the thieves were plainly discernible on the grassplot, and the garden-gate was found unlocked.

The case seemed clear enough, and I was soon in search of Mr. George Harding's whereabouts.

He had left London that morning, on his way to Italy; and I caught him at Folkestone, where he had been forced to wait—an accident to the train having caused him to miss the day-boat to Boulogne.

I had learned that he was an artist of considerable talent—well born and connected but poor, and bearing the reputation of having been somewhat extravagant and dissipated; though, of late, he had devoted himself assiduously enough to his profession to give his friends strong hope that he meant to retrieve those youthful errors.

I found him in his room at the hotel, lying on a sofa smoking a pipe—as handsome, strong-built a chap of twenty-eight or so as one could wish to see.

I had no time to spare, for I wished to get back to town by the next train; so I explained without any circumlocution that he must prepare to accompany me.

When I told him that he must consider himself under arrest he flamed up like a tiger—actually I thought, for a moment, that he was going to be crazy enough to show fight.

"Better not," said I, slightly rattling the handcuffs I carried in my pocket. "Just take it cool and quiet—that's natural, I know, to a gentleman like you. Only be natural, and we shall get on as easy as possible. I don't want to use these persuaders unless you make it necessary."

He calmed down at once, and began to laugh.

"My good sir," said he, "I have no doubt you are a very keen quick-witted officer; but you've been a little too fast this time, and fallen into an odd blunder."

But I assured him that he was the very person I wanted, and that I must have the pleasure of his company back to London without any delay—peaceably, if that could be managed—but, anyhow, he must go.

He stood and looked me full in the face for a minute, then he asked calmly enough,—

"Perhaps you will tell me with what I am charged?"

I told him in a few words, and pulled out the warrant; he just gave one long breath and sat down in a chair, as white as a ghost, with the strangest expression on his face that I ever saw; but whether it was rage, horror, or guilt, or a combination of all three feelings, was more than I could decide.

When I reminded him that I was in a hurry he rose, put on his boots and coat, and looked his portmanteau, all in an orderly enough fashion, but not once opening his mouth, and looking like a man half stunned.

He did not speak a dozen words all the way up to London, and, as I never want to torment anybody, I left him in peace and read my newspaper, wondering a little, between whiles, how a fellow in his position could have walked into a scrape of exactly that sort, and then wondering at myself for being such a donkey, after all my experience, as to be surprised at anything anybody might do, gentle or simple, given inducement or pressure enough.

We reached town in good season. Harding underwent his preliminary examination, was duly identified by Mr. Ward, and safely lodged in prison. His case would come on in a few weeks, and there could be no doubt as to its termination.

There were paragraphs in the papers, of course, but Harding was not of sufficient prominence in his profession to render him a subject of any special interest.

Mr. Ward did not appear bitter, but very determined.

Four days went by, and about eight o'clock on the fourth evening I was told that a lady wished to see me on business which could not be delayed.

I got up from my desk, at which I had been occupied copying out some memoranda, and went into the room where the stranger was seated.

She rose as I entered, and turned her face full towards me. I think I never saw a more lovely countenance, just from its expression of mingled purity and strength.

"This is Mr. Ransom?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes, madam," I answered, bowing. "You wished to see me on some matter of importance?"

"I am Mrs. Morton Ward," she said, very quietly. "I have been in Glasgow since Tuesday. I only heard this morning of George Harding's arrest."

The banker's wife! If my face expressed half the surprise I felt it must have been an exceedingly astonished countenance that met hers. Of course, I controlled myself in a second, and, as she stopped short, either from emotion, or being at a loss just what to say next, I spoke, to give her time.

"Did you wish to see me in reference to him?" I inquired.

"Yes," she replied, slowly. "I came here to tell you that—George Harding is innocent of the charge brought against him—innocent, I say!"

I was a good deal taken aback by this

emphatic assertion, coming from the source it did, and perhaps the consciousness that I was behaving very differently from my ordinary business-self made my voice a little gruff as I answered,—

"Well, ma'am, I hope he will be able to prove that he is; but, I must say, appearances are pretty strong against him."

"I know they are," she said, growing, if possible, paler than she was before, but speaking with an energy oddly at variance with the almost apathetic calmness of her manner. "Mr. Ransome, a more fiendish plot to ruin an innocent man was never devised by any human being!"

I stared at her, wondering for an instant if her brain were a little unsettled. But no; there was no sign of insanity in that face. She might be a woman worked up to a pitch of such desperation that she was reckless of consequence; but she knew well what she was doing, and meant to go through the task she had undertaken.

"A plot?" I repeated. "Admitting that to be so, madam, there could only be one person who devised it—"

"Only one," she interrupted.

"And that—"

"Was Morton Ward," she interrupted, again.

A sudden trembling-fit seized her, and for a little she could not speak.

There was a jug of water on the table. I poured out some, and handed it to her in silence.

I knew the threatening hysteria was more likely to pass if I let her alone, and I was not sorry to have a few moments to think over her astounding declaration.

Presently I looked at her. She had drunk the water, and was leaning back in her chair, as quiet as at first.

When she met my eyes she made a movement of her head to signify that she was able to talk again.

"You meant what you said?" I asked.

"You accuse your husband? Mr. Morton Ward is your husband?"

"Yes."

"And you tell me deliberately that his charge against George Harding is a plot—a conspiracy?"

"I do."

"And his motive?"

"Revenge—the cruellest and most cold-blooded that a man ever took," she replied, in a voice which had grown as stern and unflinching as her face. "Mr. Ransom, I must tell you everything."

"Yes, else I can be of no assistance. Don't keep back a single detail, however slight, however difficult to speak of," I said, beginning to be a good deal interested and more puzzled.

"I know how this must sound," she went on; "I know what you must think of a woman who can accuse her husband of such a crime. But what can I do? I cannot, I dare not, leave an innocent man to suffer, if anything in my power can help him."

"You can just do, madam, what is always best under all circumstances," said I; "that is, tell the whole truth—the consequence of doing that is in no human being's hands."

She sat still for a little, then said abruptly,—

"I was once engaged to George Harding. He was poor, and my family never rested until they separated us. I know, for awhile after that, he was somewhat dissipated, but never so much so as they are saying now. Two years ago I was persuaded to marry Mr. Ward. I suppose all this sounds irrelevant; but I had to tell it, to make the rest of my story clear."

"Tell it in your own way, madam," I said, knowing from experience this was the only hope of getting a clear, straightforward account as to any knowledge she might possess in regard to the robbery.

"I never saw Mr. Harding, after my marriage, until a few weeks ago," she continued.

"He had been in Italy, and only returned to attend to some business. We met here in London by accident; but Mr. Ward was very angry."

"You told him you had met Harding?"

"I meant to do so—indeed, I did—but he heard of it before I had an opportunity to tell him."

"He was angry?"

"He never is—at least he never shows it," she replied. "He only told me this: if I ever exchanged another word with George Harding, he would make us both repent it so bitterly that we would wish we were dead."

"And did you—I mean you disobeyed him?"

"Yes," she answered, very quietly. "Last week, Harding came down to Twickenham; he met me when I was out walking. I feel sure now that Mr. Ward was informed of it, though I had no suspicion then."

"Did you see Mr. Harding after that?"

"Yes. I got a note from him, begging for one last interview before he went back to Italy. It was wrong of me, if you will; but I consented."

"Well?" I asked, as she paused.

"This was on Sunday. Mr. Ward had gone to Edinboro' the night before—called away, he said, by sudden business. I was engaged on Sunday evening—my sister-in-law was to be at the house. I wrote to Harding to come on Monday night; I would meet him at the back gate which leads into the shrubbery."

She stopped again, but evidently neither from confusion nor shame—her features never altered—her voice did not falter.

"It was no silly romance, no wrong feeling, Mr. Ransom, which caused me to do this," she said, presently. "I knew that George was poor—tormented by old debts; it was in my power to put him straight with the world; I wanted to ask it as a right, because—I had loved him."

"Ah!" I said, involuntarily.

"Not with Mr. Ward's money," she hurried on; "neither he nor I would have stooped to that, to save my soul or his! But I have a few thousand pounds—they were given to me six months ago by a cousin, when he was dying—given in bank-notes, so nobody knew anything about the matter."

"I understand," I said. "Well, Harding came into the garden on Monday evening?"

"Yes—we were there for over an hour; he would not let me help him," she said; and even now, womanlike, she stopped to sigh over her disappointment.

"You saw him out—and shut the gate after him?"

"I could swear I looked it, though the servants found it unlocked in the morning," she replied.

"Was Mr. Ward at home when you got back to the house?"

"I met him in the garden-walk, Mr. Ransom."

"Had he seen Harding?"

"He did not say so. He greeted me as usual; said he had returned unexpectedly a little while before, and just added: 'You walk late!' His voice frightened me then, but in a moment he was smiling and pleasant."

"What happened after that?"

"He bade me good-night, and I went to my room. I had fallen asleep, and was awakened by the ringing of the bell; the servants were downstairs when I went into the library. Mr. Ward only told me that the safe had been robbed by burglars."

"Then he did not mention Harding?"

"Oh, no—and I never thought—not once!" she said. "It had been settled, days before, that I was to start on Tuesday morning, for Glasgow, with my sister-in-law. We did start. I knew nothing of what had occurred till I read it yesterday in a newspaper. I took the first train back."

Her voice had quickened and grown tremulous as she spoke. She checked herself suddenly, and pressed her hand against her bosom—afraid, I knew, poor soul, that the

least giving way to excitement would make her break down completely. I motioned to her to sit quietly, and occupied myself for a few moments arranging some papers which lay on the table. Presently I glanced at her, and saw that she had recovered her enforced composure, so I asked,—

"What has passed between you and Mr. Ward in regard to the matter—what have you told him?"

"Everything," she replied; "everything."

Before I put my next question I knew what the answer would be; but, all the same, I inquired,—

"What did he say?"

"That my story did not hinder the other fact being true—only corroborated it, indeed! I had not locked the gate, and he—George Harding—knew it, and came back afterwards with an accomplice, and committed the robbery."

I had not much doubt myself but what this was the case; for, during these four days, I had learned a good deal in regard to Mr. Harding, and knew that, at one time at least, he had been mixed up with a rather shady set of people.

But, all the same, I felt very sorry for this unfortunate lady. No man of penetration and experience could have entertained the slightest doubt of her having told the exact truth in every particular.

If there had been anything beyond, she would have revealed it as unflinchingly, however much it might have militated against herself, in her eager hope of serving the man she believed so deeply wronged.

"I do not know who Harding's lawyers are," she said, rousing me from the unpleasant reverie into which I had fallen, "but I should have come to you in any case, Mr. Ransom, for I know you to be a kind and just man."

"How did you chance to know anything at all about me?" I asked.

"You remember a young fellow named James Corey? He would have been transported, except for your diligence in tracing a crime to its real source. Well, his mother was an old servant in our family. She had so often talked to me about you; so, when I saw your name, I determined to come here."

"I do not perceive, madam, how I can help you—"

"Yes, you can," she interrupted; "you can get me permission to see Harding—I must see him once!"

"I can do that, certainly, and I will," I answered; "but you must excuse me for reminding you that if Mr. Ward were to discover you had been to the prison—"

She did not wait for me to finish; she flung out her hand, as if waving that chance aside as a matter of no consequence, and asked quickly,—

"Do you mean there is nothing else can be done?"

"Mr. Harding's solicitors would be the best judges of that," I replied; "but I think there is nothing. Fancy being called as a witness for Harding, in a criminal suit, and testifying against your husband!"

A second gesture of that nervous hand told how little any regard to appearances or the opinions of others would weigh with her here.

"Then, too," I urged, "you must not think me cruel—but, since you have talked frankly with me, I must tell you the truth."

"Yes, yes—I knew you would do that!"

"Well, Mr. Ward's assertion was quite correct—your story would tell terribly against Harding."

"I looked the garden gate," she said; "I tell you I locked it, Mr. Ransom. Another thing: Do you believe that a man capable of robbery would have refused the money I offered? I had known many a criminal, many a lost degraded wretch, display such incomprehensible scruples, generosity, and even traits of honour, that Harding's refusal did not sur-

prise me; but this was a question utterly useless to enter upon.

"I never thought about being a witness," she added, when I remained silent. "I hoped that what I have told you might hinder the matters coming to a trial—that Mr. Ward could be induced to drop the affair, if he were shown clearly that everything told against himself."

I explained to her the impossibility of this, and reminded her that if, as she believed, her husband were animated by a spirit of revenge, no inducements would be of any avail.

"From a legal point of view, you can see that nothing does tell against him," I said, in conclusion; "you and I may believe that he is doing a wicked wrong, just to gratify his malice; but he has already identified George Harding—sworn to his identity; there is no backing-out possible."

She uttered one low groan, fuller of anguish than floods of tears, and sat mute for a little with her head turned away. Presently she looked back at me, and said quietly as ever,—

"You promise that I shall see him—to-morrow?"

"Yes, I can arrange it for to-morrow—about two o'clock—if that time will suit you."

It was settled that she should call for me, and, after a little more conversation, she rose to go.

"I wish I could thank you," she said, while her lips quivered slightly. "You have been very good to me."

I think I never felt so sorry for any woman in my life, but words of condolence would only have been cruel.

"You must get home and rest," I said. "If you do not, all this terrible excitement will make you ill."

"I shall not be ill," she answered. "When the worst comes, I shall not even be able to die. Some women would, I think; but I shall have to live on and on, knowing that the man who loved me is enduring a living death through me—through me."

She turned to go. I opened the door for her, and gave her my arm to the carriage in silence. I could not, much as I longed to, hold forth the least hope, and it was better that she should face the plain truth from the outset.

The next day she drove to my lodgings at the appointed hour, and we went to the prison. After a very brief delay, we were shown into George Harding's cell.

He was writing busily when the door opened. He started up at sight of her, and stepped quickly forward, exclaiming:

"Elinor! Elinor!"

"Yes, George," she answered.

Then they stood for a moment with clasped hands, looking mutely in each other's face. I was moving quietly away, but Mrs. Ward stopped me.

She told me all about the interview, which came on in due season, and of course there was only one way for it to end. George Harding was convicted, and sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

The day after his condemnation Mrs. Ward disappeared. With all his efforts, with unlimited money at his command, her husband could find no trace of her whereabouts.

Two years went by, and, at the expiration of that period, the rich banker was on the eve of failure. He had speculated in a reckless fashion very unlike his former staid business habits, and the result had been a sudden and overwhelming ruin.

The day after I learned this fact, an American with whom I had grown quite intimate, through my having been to assist him in privately settling a very troublesome business, called to bid me good-bye, as he was to sail for the New World the next morning.

He showed me a pair of diamond bracelets he had purchased for his sister. They answered to the description of those which had been stolen from Morton Ward. My friend had also obtained from the same source certain

American bonds. A reference to my notebook showed that one of those taken from Mr. Ward's safe—the numbers of the others he had not been able to remember. All these things my American had bought from a certain Jew dealer, whom I knew to have been at one period in Mr. Ward's employment and confidence.

That evening, I paid a visit to the banker's lodgings—he was living in London now. I was shown up at once to his room, and the first words I said were:

"I have called on important business, Mr. Ward. Your lost bonds and jewels have been found."

He sank back in his chair, looking like a dead man. I stood and watched him.

The story was soon told.

He attempted neither denial nor bravado. He realised perfectly that the game was up, and bore the final blow very well indeed, unexpected as it must have been, for he had supposed my American friend safe out of the country—bonds, jewels, and all.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"I shall have to ask you to go with me," I said. "Of course, you know that."

He did not speak again, but quietly made his preparations, and I took him to the police station, where he passed the night.

The next morning he was found dead in his cell—he had poisoned himself.

Of course, in due time, George Harding was not only pardoned, but cleared from every stain. I was able to furnish him a clue to Mrs. Ward's whereabouts, and he and I went in search of her to a mountain-village in Austria, which had been her place of refuge during all that dreary time.

In a few months the pair were married and set out for America. I was over there last year and saw them, and a very, very happy couple they were. They were prosperous people, too; for, besides a small fortune which an uncle in Australia had left him, Harding had been successful in his profession, and his wife managed admirably the Virginia plantation, which will probably be their home during the rest of their lives. H. S. D.

A ROYAL FANCY.—Among the follies not generally known of the late King of Bavaria was the erection of a circus on the first floor of the royal palace at Munich. The ceiling was made to imitate the sky at night, with the moon and stars, lit up from behind by electric lights. On the walls was a series of coloured frescoes representing various country scenes. The monarch and his guests first went to the theatre. They then returned to the palace and supped. About two in the morning the king ordered his charger, and, mounting, invited his friends to follow him. Their horses were brought up, and, as soon as they were all in the saddle, his majesty rode off to the circus. The royal party galloped round the ring several times. The king stopped, descended, and tapped at the door of the *capanna*. Suddenly the door opened as if by magic, and a crowd of persons emerged from it. They were dressed in the different country costumes of Italy, and bore baskets of fruit, cake, and wine, of which the guests partook. During the repast an invisible choir sang Italian airs, accompanied by a brass band. His majesty again mounted his charger, and followed by his friends, rode round the circus once more. He now knocked at the door of the *auberge*, and French peasants came out with more wine and eatables, which the poor guests, already surfeited, were bound to consume rather than offend their eccentric host. The musicians here executed a number of favourite French songs. The same performance was gone through at the door of a Swiss chalet painted on the wall; and then the king, at half-past four in the morning, abruptly withdrew, leaving his companions more dead than alive.

FACETIA.

A POET wants to know "where the fleecy clouds are woven." In the air-loom of course.

TEACHER: "John, give me a sentence containing the word contents." Boy: "The contents of a cow is milk."

"Is your father a man of sedentary habits?" "Sedentary? Well, I rather fancy he is—he sits on me every time he sees me!"

THE countryman, who committed suicide in a well a few days ago doubtless thought that he could not find a spot where he could more readily kick the bucket.

OLD TAXPAYER: "Well, my little man, what do you expect to be when you grow up?" Little Boy: "A politician like papa." "A politician, eh?" "Yes, I hate work."

POREWAY: "Well, Blobson, you've made a pretty good thing out of the grocery business, haven't you?" Blobson: "Oh, yes, I've made a success of it in a small weigh."

CUSTOMER to BARBER: "Do you speak more than one language. Barber: "Yes, I speak English and Sherman." Customer: "Well, I wish you would talk to me German." Barber: "You understand Sherman?" Customer: "No."

A FOOLISH EXTRAVAGANCE.—"Young man," he said, solemnly, "what would you think if I should put an enemy into my mouth to steal away my brains?" "I would (he) think, sir," hiccupped the young man, "that you were going to an unnecessary expense."

SHAMEFUL WASTE OF OPPORTUNITIES.—"Mr. Editor, did you read that article I handed you yesterday?" "Yes, sir." "What would you think after reading that if I told you that I had but one year's schooling in my life?" "I would think that you must have wasted your time most abominably."

A REVERSIBLE RULE.—Landlady (to applicant for board): "Have you children, Madam?" Applicant: "No." Landlady: "You are fortunate, for we never take families who have children." Applicant: "Have you any children?" Landlady: "Yes, two." Applicant: "Well, you are unfortunate, for we never board with families who have children."

TWO SOULS WITH BUT A SINGLE THOUGHT.—"I have to thank you for a pleasant evening, Miss Bilderback," said young Peckingspaugh, at 11 30 o'clock, as he rose to go. "I have scarcely felt as if I were an acquaintance until this evening; but now it almost seems as if I had known you for years." "I was about to make the same remark," murmured the young lady, with her eyes on the clock. "It does, indeed, seem a long time."

A CASE OF CARE.—"We are accustomed to cheek," says a bookseller, "and we are thoroughly hardened to having our books pilloined, but the other day a woman actually managed to give us a surprise in this line. She came in and asked for a particular recitation, and after a hunt of some twenty minutes the clerk unearthed it in a volume we sell for sixpence. The woman seized upon it and sat down, and began to pore over it. The clerk supposed she was going to sit there and commit it to memory, but if she had that intention her time presently gave out, and she mildly asked if she might copy part of it. The clerk is a long-suffering fellow—we all have to be for that matter, in our business—and he said 'certainly.' She thereupon asked if he would 'lend' her a piece of paper. That 'lend' was a delectable piece of euphemism, and it fetched him so that he handed over a first-class pad. Then she modestly begged for a pencil, and when he had meekly produced a brand-new one, she sat down and copied every word of the recitation from beginning to end. When she got through, she gathered herself up, and without a word, she walked off with her copy and the clerk's new pencil."

BRIGHT BOY: "Which is the heaviest, a pound of lead or a pound of feathers?" Coltured Child: "Nishez." "Neither?" "No, as there are only two, neither of them can be the heaviest."

COUNTRY MINISTER (to boy fishing): "What will your father say, little boy, when he discovers that you have been fishing on Sunday?" Boy: "I dunno, sir: it depend on how many fish I ketch."

WIFE: "What do you mean, John, when you say that my studying German is a real act of kindness?" Husband: "I mean, my dear, that it will give the English language a little needed rest."

KINDNESS TO ANIMALS.—Old Lady (to little boy caressing a dog): "That is right, little boy. Always be kind to dumb animals." Little Boy: "Yes'm; I'll have a little hitched to his tail soon's I kin git him quiet."

SOMEBODY AHEAD OF THEM.—First Burglar: "Bill, the jig is up. No cracking that bank to-night." Second Burglar: "Wot's the matter, detectives onto us?" First Burglar: "No; I saw the chairman an' cashier buying tickets for 'Frisco this mornin'."

NO TIME TO LOSE.—Gus: "Where are you going, Jack?" Jack: "Up to see that pretty little widow of old Moneybags." Gus: "Why, the old man died only two or three months ago." Jack: "I know it, but I saw the widow in the park to-day, and she is in half mourning. It's time to call, Gus, it's time to call."

THE waiter expostulated with the guests for summoning him by a snapping of the fingers, with the remark: "Are you calling for the dog, ser?" "Goodness," exclaimed the guest, "are you a mind-reader?" "Why do you ask?" inquired the waiter. "Why," returned the guest, "I was about to ask for sausage."

A TRUSTFUL TRAMP.—Woman (to tramp): "And if I give you a nice plate of hash you promise to eat some wood?" Tramp: "Yes, m." Woman (doubtfully): "I don't know whether I can put confidence in you or not." Tramp (reproachfully): "You ought to ma'am. I have confidence enough in you to eat the hash."

THE FAMOUS PIE MAKER.—A young teacher, instilling into the minds of her class some elementary United States history, asked: "Can any one of you tell me what made George Washington famous and respected—what he did that he is honoured for?" A moment's silence, broken by the exclamation of a bright boy in the class: "He made pies." Perhaps everybody hasn't heard of "Washington pies," but that boy knew all about them.

A LITTLE MISCHIEF-MAKER.—A lady was calling on a lady, and the small daughter of the house kept walking around her and studying her head intently. Finally the caller became so nervous she took the child in her lap. "Well, Fannie," she said, "what is it? You seem to be looking for something." "Why, w'y," hesitated the child, "I was looking for your other face." "What do you mean? I don't understand," said the puzzled visitor. "Oh, mamma said you were two-faced, but I don't see only one. You haven't got two faces, have you?"

A VERY SICK MAN.—"I am sorry to see you neglecting your business this way, Smith. They say that you don't spend half-an-hour a at your office." "Well, a fellow must look after his health, you know." "Yes, but you don't look sick. What is the matter with you?" "My wife takes 'The Family Health Gazette,' and she makes out that I have a tendency to softening of the brain, with complicated symptoms of Bright's disease, liver complaint, dyspepsia, palpitation of the heart, inflammation of the bunions, or ematation of the spleen, indigestion of the oesophagus, hypertrophy of the palate, and besides, that I am not at all well. She insists that I must observe all the health rules in 'The Gazette,' and you see I've no time for anything else."

"What do you want?" he inquired of the man who held the subscription book. "Half-a-crown." "And what for?" "To bury a policeman." The sport fished out a sovereign and handed it to the man. "Bury eight," he said.

WAR REMINISCENCES.—"How well I remember," said Dumley, as he proudly brandished the sword, "the first time that I ever drew that once shining blade!" "Where did you draw it, Dumley?" inquired Featherly; "in a raffle?"

A YOUNG MAN who was examined for an appointment came across this question: "What states and territories would you cross in going from New York to the Pacific Ocean?" He didn't know, and so he wrote: "None. I would go around by Cape Horn."

AN ENRAGED MUSICIAN.—An old coloured musician was engaged to furnish music at a country wedding which was to take place a number of miles from his house. The old darkey, with the box containing the fiddle under his arm, had almost reached his destination, when he was overtaken by his son, panting and blowing. "Daddy—you has done—forgot do—do bow—ter—do fiddle." "Where am it, niggah?" "At home, ob course." The trip back, however, was made in very good time, as the exasperated old negro chased the boy the whole distance, hitting an occasional whack at him with his cane.

A SPOILED HAT.—A Bristol lady was informed by her servant-girl that a box of flowers had been left at the door for her. Being occupied at the time, the lady told the servant to open the box, sprinkle the flowers with water, and put them on the ice, adding, that she would attend to them when she went down to tea. The box really contained a new spring hat, which had been ordered, but was forgotten at the time the servant reported the arrival. Only the flowers were to be seen when the box was opened. The servant followed her orders explicitly, and the flowers were so thoroughly drenched, that from a "perfect love of a hat," it became a limp and worthless mass of discoloured ribbons and straw.

A DESPERATE RISK.—"I am truly sorry to give you pain, Mr. Hankinson," said the young lady, "but please do not allude to this subject again. I can never be your wife." "That is your final answer, Miss Irene?" "It is." "Nothing can induce you to change your decision?" "My mind is firmly and unalterably made up." "Miss Irene," said the young man, rising and looking about for his hat, "before coming here this evening I made a bet of £10 with Van Perkins that you would say no to my proposal. I have won. It was taking a risk, but I was dead broke. Miss Irene," he continued, his voice quivering with emotion, "you have saved a despairing man from the fate of a suicide, and won the lifelong respect and esteem of a grateful heart. Good evening."

AN EFFECTIVE COMPLIMENT.—The other day a man was walking slowly up the street and encountered a man walking hurriedly down. They ran into each other, both drew off and apologised, and the one in a hurry added: "I've been so angry all the morning I couldn't see straight." "Nothing serious, I hope." "Well, my wife had some photos taken and the artist made a botch job. I'm now on my way to punch his head." "Can I see them?" They were exhibited, and after a careful inspection the gentleman said: "My friend, you are way off. The work is well done, and you ought to be proud of your wife's looks." "Do you mean it?" "Certainly. There are not ten as handsome women in London." "Shoo!" "It's a fact, and the work is that of a real artist. You should be more than satisfied." "Well, I declare! I think I've been too hasty, and I'll drop the matter at once. Glad I didn't punch the photographer's head." "Yes, so am I," said the other to himself, as he went his way. It was the artist himself.

SOCIETY.

On the whole, there was no man whom Europe could so ill spare as the Emperor Frederick; for his sweet gentleness of disposition was such as is rarely found in men of his vigorous and manly nature. He was every inch a man, and there was nothing effeminate about him. We lay great stress on this, because it has been hinted in certain quarters that the late Emperor was too much under the dominion of his wife, or, in other words, "henpecked." Nothing could be farther from the truth than this. The Empress Victoria is, like her Royal mother, what the French call *une matresse femme*, that is, a woman of superior intelligence with great administrative ability.

Nothing very brilliant is likely to take place for a good while yet in any European Court. In some cases, where the Kings are quite well, the Queens are ailing and disinclined for company; in other cases this programme is reversed. Where there is nothing the matter with any of them, there yet seems a something lacking wherewith to make a fuss about or start rejoicings. Grand State coaches are at such a discount that it is a question whether one more will ever be built; the old gilded arks on wheels, that used to strike such awe and admiration into the hearts of mobs, having been completely cut out by more resplendent vehicles attached to travelling circuses.

A curious story comes from Constantinople. A short time ago the Italian tenor, Masini, was singing to the inmates of the Sultan's harem. The ladies were, of course, hidden from view, but as he finished the aria from the "Eugenio," he was astonished to hear the strain taken up by an exquisitely trained female voice, in the song "Valentia," which, in the opera, follows the aria. This circumstance so interested Masini that he instituted inquiries, and succeeded in unearthing a romance. The fair vocalist was, it seemed, the daughter of a high Turkish official. She had studied in Rome, with the intention of going on the operatic stage; but on her return to Constantinople she was unfortunate enough to attract the attention of the Sultan, who offered her the doubtful honour of a fraction of his heart, and a place in his harem; an offer, which, much against her will, she was forced to accept.

Poor little Princess Wilhelmina of Holland! The political gossips will not leave her small Highness alone, but are determined to find her a husband betimes, whether she and her parents will or not. Now it is the twelve-year-old Duke of Saxony, grandson of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, who is declared to be her future partner; but the parents of this Princess are sensible enough to wish their daughter to grow strong, wise, and well-informed, before they betroth her to anyone. And at present the little heiress to the Throne of the Low Countries is as hearty a little hoyden as ever a prudent mother allowed to run wholesomely wild; and would rather prefer a game of romps to the best born suitor that could possibly be chosen for her hand and affections. Needless to state the juveniles have not been consulted on the subject of their future nuptial relations, and so, like the babies in the poem, "all unconscious of their doom, the little angels play."

The report that the Prince of Wales takes lessons on that fashionable instrument, the banjo, and that he occupies his spare moments in thrumming Ethiopian ditties, is as absurd as it is groundless. The next thing we shall hear will probably be that Prince Albert Victor is studying the bones, that Prince George is practising chromatic scales on the tambourine, and that the trio intend to "black up" in orthodox fashion and appear in the conventional "loud" striped shirts and fancy unmentionables at the next entertainment of the Amateur Orchestral Society.

STATISTICS.

MARRIAGE AND EDUCATION.—Of the men who married in the year 1886, 98 per 1,000, and of the women, 115 per 1,000, were unable to write their names, and signed the register by mark; while in 37 per 1,000 of the marriages both husband and wife were alike illiterate. These figures show an immense improvement, as the result of the general diffusion of elementary education since the passing of the Act of 1870. For example, in 1870 out of every 1,000 marriages 198 men, 273 women, and in 116 cases both parties, had to sign by mark; while last year these figures were reduced to 98, 115, and 37 respectively. Taking England and Wales as a whole, the number of men who are unable to write is considerably smaller than that of women, though the difference in this respect between the sexes is rapidly diminishing; for in 1856 there were 140 such women to 100 such men, whereas in 1886 there were but 120. But taking the counties separately there is great diversity, and the general rule is that in agricultural counties the male, and in mining and industrial counties the female, is the worse educated sex.

GEMS.

CONCENTRATION is the secret of strength in politics, in war, in trade—in short, in all management of human affairs.

THERE are truths which some men despise because they have not examined them, and which they will not examine because they dislike them.

How easy is the thought, in certain moods, of the loveliest, most unselfish devotion. How hard is the doing of the thought in the face of a thousand unlovely difficulties.

THE only cure for selfishness is sacrifice; the only cure for unbelief is to shake off the ague of doubt by doing your conscience's bidding; the only cure for timidity is to plunge into some dreaded duty before the chill comes on.

LET your wit rather serve you as a buckler to defend yourself, by a handsome reply, than the sword to wound others, though with ever so facetious reproach; remembering that a word cuts deeper than a sharp weapon, and the wound it makes is longer curing.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPRING SALAD.—Chop coarsely two heads of crisp lettuce, one small bunch of new onions and one medium sized cucumber, and season well with pepper, salt, and vinegar; ornament with hard boiled eggs cut in rings.

USE OF SALT.—Salt is preservative in its nature. If too much of it is used in cooking food it was against the juices of the stomach and thus retards digestion, and it will in time derange the digestive organs. It is best to use it in small quantities.

RHUBARB JAM.—Peel and cut up the rhubarb, boil till reduced to a pulp with a very little water; allow 1 lb. of sugar, 1 oz. of sweet almonds, blanched and chopped, and half a lemon (cut in slices) to every pound of pulp; boil for three-quarters of an hour or an hour, remove the lemon peel, and put into pots.

BREAKFAST OR TEA DISH.—An excellent dish for breakfast or tea can be made with the cold veal left from dinner. Melt two table-spoonsful of butter in the frying-pan, add one teaspoonful of flour, and stir till smooth; then add one cupful of water, or stock if you have it, and season with salt and pepper. When it boils add one quart of coarsely chopped cold veal. Let this heat thoroughly, then dish it up on slices of nicely browned toast. A dropped egg put on the middle of each slice of toast and veal is liked by some. Serve all as hot as possible.

MISCELLANEOUS.

OUR LITTLE SISTER.—Within the kingdom of Italy is situated the republic of San Marino, the smallest republic in the world. It owes its foundation to a hermit whose name it bears. He went to Italy to work as a mason at the rebuilding of the walls of the Rimini. Its territory covers about twenty-two square miles. The population numbers eight thousand souls. It is perched on the summit of a mountain called Mount Titan, or the Gigante, which sometimes leads to this little state being termed the Titanic Republic. The republic has an order of chivalry, created in 1889, under the name of the Order of San Marino. The motto is "Libertas." When Italy became a kingdom, Napoleon desired to preserve this small state intact. "It is a rare sample of a republic to preserve," said the emperor.

FOREIGN POLITENESS.—In Italy, as well as in France, we often find a pleasant disposition to offer service, even if it is not directly paid for. I was once in a city of northern Italy, where I needed some articles of clothing. Having just arrived, I was entirely unacquainted with the place, and inquired of a clerk at a forwarding or express office, where I had some business, the address of a good shop where I could buy what I wanted. He thereupon put on his hat and said he would go with me to one. I did not wish him to put himself to so much trouble, but he insisted that as I did not know the city it would be much better for him to accompany me. He took me to the best place in town, helped me in my selection, made suggestions to the shopkeeper, and when I had finished my business, offered to go with me to buy anything else I might want. It is possible that he may have been paid for bringing purchasers to this shop, but the price I paid for what I bought was so small that there could not have been much profit to anybody, and I do not believe that the large and wealthy firm by whom this young man was employed would allow one of their clerks to go out in this way merely to make a little money. Let any stranger in one of our cities enter a railway office and try to get one of the clerks to go with him to a tailor's shop and help him to select a suit of clothes, and when he has made known his desire, let him wait and see what happens next.

A FUNERAL OF ANTS.—The writer saw a large number of ants surrounding some that he had killed, and determined to watch their proceedings. Accordingly he followed four or five that started off from the nest towards a hillock a short distance off, in which was an ant's nest. This they entered, and in about five minutes they reappeared, followed by others. All fell into rank, walking regularly and slowly, two by two, until they arrived at the spot where lay the dead bodies of the soldier ants. In a few minutes two of the ants advanced and took up the body of one of their comrades, then two others, and so on, till all were ready to march. First walked two ants, bearing a body, then two others with another dead ant, and so on until the whole line was extended to about forty pairs, and the procession now moved slowly onward, followed by an irregular body of about two hundred ants. Occasionally the two laden ants stopped, and laying down the dead body it was taken up by the two walking unburdened behind them, and thus by occasionally relieving each other, they arrived at a sandy spot near the sea. The body of ants now commenced digging with their jaws a number of holes in the ground, in each of which a dead ant was laid. Then they all fell to and filled up the graves. This did not quite finish the remarkable circumstance attending this insect funeral. Six or seven of the ants had attempted to run off without performing their share of the task of digging; these were brought back and killed on the spot. A single grave was quickly dug, and they were all dropped into it.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

F. R.—Fair, but unformed.

J. E. M.—You should be rather vain, and a little inclined to flattery.

ORANGEMAN—See a doctor. You might not be fit for military service at all.

CONA must consult a physician as to her illness. The marriage mentioned would be illegal.

M. S.—You can do nothing but write and explain the matter to the colonel of the regiment in which her husband serves.

JANE.—1. Water acidulated with a little lemon-juice is a good remedy for a shiny skin. 2. Your handwriting is very fair. 3. Yes.

M. M.—Sulphur will remove scurf; put half an ounce into a pint bottle of water, and wash the head with the solution about twice a week.

J. J.—1. Glycerine and lemon-juice will whiten and soften the hands. 2. No. 3. Your penmanship for a boy of seventeen is very good.

CONSTANT READER.—No. The supposition, no doubt, owes its origin to the appearance of some of the seal species, which at a distance resemble the description given of mermals.

LANDA.—Try taking oatmeal porridge for breakfast. It is said to be very beneficial, and avoid all greasy or rich foods. Leave poisons severely alone.

LILLIE D.—1. Pure olive oil, and not much of it. Brush well two or three times a day. 2. Exercise in the open air, temperance, and cheerfulness.

A. E. M.—1. They are questions from some school or other competition. Consult a good text book. 2. The hair is seal brown. 3. Practise from a good copy.

N. R. V.—Renaissance (French, new birth) is the designation of a peculiar style of architecture and ornamentation, founded on the antique, which took its origin in Italy about the commencement of the fifteenth century; also of the period commencing with the fourteenth and ending with the first half of the sixteenth century, which witnessed the revival of classical literature and the fine arts in Southern Europe.

L. R.—The favourite hat for travelling this year is the sailor, the material straw, black, white, or a mixed straw, generally trimmed with a band of ribbed ribbon in two colours, like those of a cricketing club or an order ribbon, but very often displaying flowers, which for travelling had far better be left at home. Toques are not quite things of the past, but the sailors and the Langtry hat, the same as the bonnet without strings, are rapidly superseding them.

M. R.—There is much imprudence in an unreasonable jealousy. It is a sure way to drive your husband from you. His rights to society were abridged by marriage, but to demand of him the total sacrifice of his friendships and associations is to place him in a very humiliating position. No magnanimous or just woman will justify you in that, and the young lady referred to very properly resents the "home rule" over her friend. Our advice would be to make the lady your friend as she is of your husband.

R. W. C.—When colouring steel blue it is necessary that it shall first be finely polished on its surface, and then exposed to a uniform degree of heat. There are three ways of producing the colour—first, by a flame emitting no soot, as spirits of wine; secondly, by a hot plate of iron; and thirdly, by wood ashes. As a very regular degree of heat is requisite, the latter medium is preferable for fine work. The work must be covered over with the wood-ashes, and carefully watched until the proper colour is produced.

G. M. D.—1. To mend india-rubber shoes or goloahs rub the patch (made of thick muslin) and shoe thoroughly with sharp sandpaper. Smear both with liquid india-rubber (made by dissolving small pieces of unvulcanized rubber in warm spirits of turpentine or chloroform) five times, allowing them to dry after each application. Repeat this application once more, and before they have dried apply the patch with pressure, if possible, and the boot or shoe will be mended. 2. Your writing and composition are both far above the average.

H. L. C.—1. In ancient times women's side-saddles were made without horns, but there was a high pommel to hold on to. The side-saddle used by women in Iceland has a seat with a back, like a common chair, and has, instead of a stirrup, a little shelf on which both the feet can rest. The seat of the side-saddle of Queen Elizabeth was a velvet cushion, and the pommel gilded metal. 2. A third horn, called the hunting-horn, is put on the side, under which the left knee is placed. This is said to give the rider almost as firm a seat as can be got in the man's saddle.

G. R. D.—Egypt is not a "province" of Turkey; nor even a dependency; but a suzerainty, as in Morocco, or Tunis, or Tripoli. Each and all of them have an independence in internal affairs, but in all foreign relations act under the supervision of the Sultan at Constantinople. The Ruler of Egypt, called Khedive, is so by virtue of the Sultan's assent, and a tribute which he pays to the Sultan of seven hundred thousand pounds a year. The bond which holds all the Barbary powers and Egypt in this deference to Turkey is that the Sultan is the recognized head of the Mohammedan Church. The recent war was in reality a rising of the "national" element in Egypt against the English and French who have been rapidly "civilizing" the country by managing its revenues, dividing its offices, &c.

C. R. W.—You had better direct your mind from your betrothed, unless he promptly reforms. It is a dangerous thing for a woman to marry a drunkard. It affords ample justification for terminating the engagement.

CAROLINE.—You had better take your parents into your counsel, and see if they cannot help you to get a better understanding with your sweetheart. Have you told them of your engagement? This is a very serious matter and admits of no trifling.

F. N. W.—Anyone, by constant practice, could acquire some skill in the art of ventriloquism, and a few are successful almost at the first attempts, but such skill is quite useless for the purpose of giving entertainments, unless it is accompanied by considerable powers of mimicry.

BEAUTY.—To help get rid of snails, strew table salt very freely over the cellar and other infested places. A paste made of train oil and soot will form a barrier over which they will not pass. Black ants may be dispersed, it is said, by scattering a few leaves of green wormwood among their haunts.

L. L.—Rabbits are said to live eight or nine years. They begin to breed at the age of six months, have several litters in a year, and five to eight at a time. It has been estimated that in four years a single pair of rabbits would, if unmolested, become the progenitors of more than 1,250,000.

N. N.—1. Sachet powders may be obtained at any chemist's at a small cost. 2. You are too young to question the advice given by your mother. She has your best interest at heart, and you should not attempt in any way to thwart her desires. Wait for at least five years before contemplating marriage.

LOVE ETERNAL.

This world is full of weeping,
There is sighing in the air
From loving ones o'erburdened
With a heavy weight of care;
The hopes and dreams of beauty
That we feed our hearts upon
Have disappeared for ever;
Yet Love lives on.

From scenes where joy delighted
To spread its shining tent,
The glow of youth has vanished,
The golden hours are spent;
The lovely flowers are faded,
The singing-birds are gone,
And graves are all about us,
Yet Love lives on.

Weighted down by tribulations,
Oppressed with grief and pain,
Without our stranded dwellings
In sadness we remain;
Intent upon our losses;
The weeds of woe we don,
And mourn our lot, unmindful
That Love lives on!

Despite neglect and coldness,
Despite the changes dear,
The trials and denials
That are ours from year to year,
Amid the desolation,
Oh, strange phenomenon!
As fresh and fair as ever
Still Love lives on!

F. W.

J. B. N.—Sultana raisins, as said before to other correspondents, are made from a kind of grape which has no seeds. It is grown seedless simply by arresting one of the laws of nature. When the grape is about half ripe the end of the vine is bent and buried in the ground. This prevents the formation of seed and the full development of the fruit, but it ripens all the same.

L. F. W.—The amount awarded to the United States for damages done to American commerce by the Confederate steamers *Alabama*, *Florida*, and *Shenandoah*, was \$2,000,000. The English arbitrator, Sir A. E. Cockburn, refused to sign the judgment of the Arbitration Commission at Geneva, mainly on the ground that the *Florida* and *Shenandoah* claims were improperly allowed. The *Alabama* sailed from England one day before the English Government telegraphed to detain her. The *Alabama* was sunk by the *Kearsarge* off Cherbourg, France, June 19, 1864; and during 1865 the United States and English Governments discussed the question of English responsibility for the damage inflicted. Finally it was agreed by England to settle the matter by arbitration, with the result stated.

H. S.—Appointees to the United States Military Academy must be between seventeen and twenty-two years of age, free from any infirmity, and able to pass a careful examination in reading, writing, orthography, arithmetic, grammar, geography, and history of the United States. The principal subjects taught in the academy are mathematics, French, drawing, tactics of all arms of the service, natural and experimental authority, chemistry, mineralogy, geology, and electricity, history, international, constitutional, and military law, Spanish, and civil and military engineering and science of war. The pay of a cadet is £108 per year, and with proper economy is sufficient for his support. Upon graduating cadets are commissioned as second lieutenants in the U. S. Army. Their promotion is dependent upon vacancies and the demands of the public service.

A. N.—The oldest town in the United States is St. Augustine, Florida. A fort was built there by the Spaniards under Menéndez in 1565.

C. C. C.—Bind a piece of cut lemon round the corn, which will gradually soften, and you will then be able to get it out with a pair of scissors, especially after soaking the toe in warm soapsuds.

E. E. F.—1. The book named is, we believe, out of print. 2. We have no personal knowledge of the company named. 3. Only a lawyer can give you the proper advice in a case like yours. If you have lost confidence in the solicitor at present employed, try another. Your lot is a hard one, and the law's delay provoking, but we see no way of bettering your condition save through the courts that must eventually award you all you justly claim.

JOHN M.—In deciding upon the number of persons to invite to a party or ball, a due regard must be paid to the size of the rooms in which it is to be given. After making allowance for a reasonable number who may not accept the invitation, there should be no more invited than can find comfortable accommodation—both standing and sitting room being taken into consideration in the calculation. Remember, also, that the floor should be perfectly free for dancing. One-third more may be invited than the rooms will comfortably hold, and all invitations should be issued three weeks before the event.

L. C. H.—1. As the visitors were so pleased with the manner in which they were entertained, there is no reason why you should feel badly because the original engagement was not kept, more especially when it does not appear that any special place had been selected at which to spend the evening. 2. A gentleman, when dancing or skating with a lady, should always invite her to rest as soon as a reasonable time has elapsed. In cases where he forgets to do so, it would not be at all improper for the lady to remind him of the fact of her feeling tired. 3. It is not considered either proper or prudent for ladies to visit a gentleman's private apartments, unless accompanied by a male escort.

M. M. J.—The lakes of Killybegs are a series of three consecutive lakes, near the centre of the county of Kerry, Ireland. The upper lake is two and a-half miles long, three-quarters of a mile broad, and contains several small islands. The Lower Range River, leading to the Middle Lake, is about three miles long. This lake has length of two miles and a breadth of one mile; the Lower Lake, containing about thirty islands, is five miles long by three broad. These lakes are widely celebrated for the beauty of their scenery, which consists in the gracefulness of the mountain outlines, and the rich and varied colour of their wooded shores, which deepen through gray rock and light green arbutus to brown mountain heath and dark firs.

F. C. W.—Easter Island is in the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean, latitude 27° south, distant about 2,300 miles from the coast of South America. It has rarely been visited. It was discovered in 1722 by Roggeveen, a Dutch navigator, and was visited in 1774 and described by Cook. It is about eleven miles long and six broad, and contains three extinct volcanoes of large size, rising to the height of 1,200 feet above the sea. The natives belong to the Polynesian race. The most remarkable feature of the island, to which attention has been called, is that it contains several hundred gigantic stone statues tolerably well chiselled, the origin of which is unknown. The latest conjecture advanced is that "the island is the remnant of a submerged continent, and that the statues were made by an extinct people who worshipped their idols in high places, and to whom the orators of volcanoes were peculiarly sacred."

O. M.—The invitations to a garden party are usually sent out two weeks before the appointed day, and if the weather proves stormy, the entertainment takes place indoors. The lawn tennis should be in order for the occasion, the croquet laid out for those who care for it, and the archery tools put in place. A platform may be prepared for dancing, with a band of music stationed thereon, and there must be a supply of camp chairs and rugs. The hostess receives her guests on the lawn, with her hat on, while the carriages drive up to the door, and the ladies go within to deposit their wraps and shake off the dust, before following the maid to where the hostess is receiving her guests. The ladies wear hats and walking dresses, though sometimes long robes are seen. The lunch consists of cold salads, tongue, ham, paties, salmon, jellies, ices, cakes, and sometimes strawberries and cream, while a napkin, fork and spoon should be placed on each plate. The lunch may be served either in the house or out of doors, just as the fancy dictates. There should be plenty of camp chairs and small tables, seating about four, as long tables are out of date.

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